Using Workplace Strategies to Develop Skills for Gifted Students

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Due to their diverse interests and different areas of ability, many gifted youngsters have multipotentiality. As a result, choosing a field of study and a career may be tricky because these talented learners are faced with several viable trajectories (Ibanez, 2015). Developing metacognitive, self-reflective, and executive function strategies earlier in life may help them learn to make strength-based choices, set appropriate goals, respond to feedback, gain their sense of accountability and agency, and develop approaches for finding mentors and advocates. These skills—which are currently not part of the mainstream curriculum (Willard-Holt et al., 2013)—will further help them be successful when they begin transitioning into the workplace, advancing in their careers, or even switching from one to another, and finding necessary support and role models. Which is why borrowing the methods employed within the corporate sector to develop potential and support career growth of the employees may empower teachers and counselors to apply these same strategies and practices within the school.

As a person who lives in both the corporate tech world (cybersecurity) and education (doctoral student), Yekaterina has been able to see how both the corporate sector and education have professional strategies that can augment each other. She has enjoyed the strength-based, talent-focused approaches employed by being in both worlds. Research has shown that companies that celebrate cognitive diversity and encourage different ways of thinking have highly productive and innovative teams. Supporting the talents of these team members and providing them with goal-setting and collaboration skills have been critical to achieving positive results. Corporations have put time, energy, and money into developing and implementing strategies to promote retention and productivity (Hedayati Mehdiabadi & Li, 2016; Herrmann International, n.d.).

S.M.A.R.T Goals

One important practice established at many large compa-

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nies that may be beneficial to students is yearly performance reviews. At the end of the year, employees complete their self-evaluation, which includes analysis of their accomplishments, strengths, weaknesses, and ideas for improvement and growth in the form of goals for next year. These goals need to be S.M.A.R.T. goals (Doran, 1981). That is, they need to be specific (target a specific area for improvement), measurable (quantify or at least suggest an indicator of progress), assignable (specify who will do it), realistic (state what results can realistically be achieved, given available resources), and time-related (specify when the results can be achieved).

Likewise, employees' supervisors complete their own evaluations of each subordinate and later have a one-on-one conversation with each. This is the time for both parties to reflect on how they performed in the past year and what needs to change for every employee to feel more supported and empowered. Often these conversations also include discussions about long-term career goals and identify strategies to accomplish them. A supervisor's role becomes that of a mentor and an advocate, especially when the goal involves advancing to the next level in the organizational hierarchy or transitioning from an individual contributor track to managerial duties.

While students are constantly being evaluated for their work in the classroom, not all schools engage their learners in self-evaluation, reflecting on last year's goals, and setting new ones for the upcoming year. Setting aside a dedicated time at the end of each school year, semester, or quarter for students to recognize and celebrate their accomplishments, establish the next set of objectives, analyze potential obstacles, and devise a plan that will allow them to achieve their personal best (Baum & Schader, 2022) is something that could greatly improve students' sense of accountability and agency, serve as a motivator for their achievements, and prepare them for life in the workforce.

Scrum Methodology

Another practice that has been gaining momentum in tech companies over the last decade is the Agile philosophy (Beck et al., 2001), which is an approach to project management used in software development that involves breaking projects into phases. It emphasizes continuous collaboration and improvement through the cycle of planning, executing, and evaluating. One specific Agile methodology used to facilitate a project is the Scrum methodology (Schwaber & Sutherland, 2020).

Scrum is an agile collaboration framework that prescribes teams to break work into goals to be completed within time-boxed iterations called sprints. The Scrum team assesses progress through daily short stand-up meetings called scrums. At the end of each sprint, two additional meetings are held: a sprint review that showcases the achievements and solicits feedback, and a sprint retrospective. The Scrum methodology may be beneficial not only in the workplace but also in the classroom, and especially in developing students' executive function skills. It could help with breaking down a big project into manageable chunks, conducting daily check-ins on progress, and holding demos of what was achieved, as well as reflections on how things can be improved, at the end of each project or unit. Further, many Scrum teams use sticky notes as visual aids to help members of the team keep track of tasks that comprise a bigger project. The team chooses an empty wall or a whiteboard in the office and splits it into four columns: "To-Do," "In Progress," "To Verify," and "Done." At the beginning of the sprint, team members write each task on a separate sticky note and place them in the "To-Do" column. As the sprint progresses, team members physically move sticky notes from one column to the next, until all of them end up in the "Done" column. This provides a visual representation of how many tasks have not been started, how much work is currently in progress, what needs to be verified, and what has already been completed. This approach should be invaluable to students as well because in addition to visual representation of the amount of work involved in a project they are working on, the process of physically moving sticky notes from one column to the next would also appeal to kinesthetic learners.

At Bridges Academy—a school for twice exceptional learners that embraces the Strength-Based, Talent-Focused Model of education (Baum & Schader, 2024)—students pursue their passions and grow their skills from novices to experts through their Enrichment Cluster and Young Expert Programs, which are built into the curriculum. During these times, students work on passion projects together or individually in an area of interest as they solve problems and create products (Sabatino & Wiebe, 2018). For instance, a student passionate about astronomy could be working with a mentor on analyzing observation data collected with a telescope for a research article, learning valuable skills in the process. Artistic students could be designing and creating their own Halloween costumes, learning how to make a sketch and use a sewing machine to make it a reality. Applying the Scrum methodology to big projects like these allows gifted learners to take their undertaking to the finish line, providing scaffolding for executive function skills that often lag behind and prevent students from having their strengths fully showcased.

Career Week

The last practice we want to mention is Career Week. Once a year, employees take a week off to attend talks and training sessions on potential career options, strategies, and trajectories within the company. They learn about the possibilities available and hear from those who have switched careers within the company about the steps they took, the advocates they worked with, and the ways they found success by utilizing their strengths. Such opportunities are especially beneficial for those who crave novelty and seek ways to engage and constantly push themselves forward. Career Week also provides an op-

portunity for employees to find support, feel included, make connections, and improve their confidence by identifying with colleagues who have had the courage and means to switch careers. By the same token, an event similar to Career Week may be helpful for students to be able to get exposure to and learn from those who walked a similar path ahead of them and to hear how they were able to get through the challenges and succeed by following their strengths, interests, passions, and the kinds of support they experienced on their journeys. While most high schools implement a version of a Career Week to help their students prepare for college, the transition from middle to high school often gets overlooked (Willis & Fugate, 2025). Implementing a similar program for gifted middle schoolers would be beneficial in supporting them during this important and vulnerable time in their lives.

Main Takeaways

Education and learning do not stop when we get our degrees. Instead, they continue throughout our lives, and we should capitalize on the synergies created by workplace practices and apply them to classroom practice. Performance reviews and S.M.A.R.T. goals, the Agile philosophy and the Scrum methodology, as well as events, such as Career Week, may benefit students in the classroom by getting them to reflect on their strengths, challenges, and goals, improving their sense of accountability and agency, teaching them executive function skills and differentiating around their executive function challenges, and creating a supportive community of mentors and advocates. **THP**

Author Bios

Yekaterina (Katrina) O'Neil spent more than 20 years in the cybersecurity industry before turning to neurodiversity advocacy inspired by her two complex children. To understand and support them better, Katrina is pursuing a doctorate in cognitive diversity. Katrina holds a B.S. and M.S. in Computer Science & Engineering from UC San Diego and a Certificate in 2e Education from Bridges Graduate School. Her writing, research, and talks can be found here: https://www.katrinaoneil.com.

Susan Baum, Ph.D. is co-director of the International Center for Talent Development and Director of the National Institute for 2E Research and Development at Bridges Academy. Professor Emeritus from The College of New Rochelle, and an international consultant, Susan is published in a multitude of books, chapters, and articles in the areas of twice-exceptional students, primary-aged gifted students, social and emotional factors affecting gifted students, and multiple intelligences.

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options; ultimately, though, it's the students who determine what constitutes proof in their classroom.

While acceleration has its merits, acceleration alone cannot instill the habits of mind that make mathematics feel vibrant. When used thoughtfully and with skepticism, I echo that AI can play a valuable role. It serves as a patient (sometimes frustrating) partner that challenges students, provides a different perspective, and occasionally makes mistakes in ways that help students learn. That tension is where true understanding lies. This is why teachers should keep AI in the classroom, while also ensuring that appropriate boundaries are set. **THP**