

Concept Development: Improving CLASS Scores

CLASS scores nationally for Head Start continue to reside in the low range in the domain of Instructional Support, particularly in the CLASS dimension of concept development. Yet research tells us that high scores in these dimensions can have significant and measurable impact on academic success. So while it is true that low scores may also cause us to lose our funding should they dip below Federal benchmarks, poor scores also suggest that we are failing in our core mission to prepare children for school. So this is not just a training about scores only; it is about providing disadvantaged children with the experiences they need to develop the communication skills and the critical thinking skills necessary to compete in the academic arena on an equal footing with children who have every advantage – children for whom the experiences necessary to acquire these skills are as taken for granted as the three square meals served up to them each day.

As low CLASS scores linger year after year, we must consider the very real possibility that our problems are not just about teacher training and performance – that there are systemic and pervasive practices that constitute real obstacles to quality interactions in our classrooms. This session will provide very specific classroom strategies for improving the way that teachers support concept development during daily interactions with children. It will give content specialist, managers, mentor/coaches, and supervisory staff specific tools to support teachers in improving their scores. But this session will also challenge each of us, including Directors, to re-examine our assumptions about what our children need most and to reconsider how we go about our daily interactions. It will identify the systemic changes necessary to move these scores into the high range and will motivate participants to commit to making the changes.

Proficiency in communication and critical thinking during early childhood predicts proficiency in reading and writing (and therefore high academic achievement) throughout the child's school years. Our children and families depend on us to provide the appropriate experiences to build these skills during the brief window of opportunity presented to us during early childhood. If we do our job, then our children will succeed.



Oh, and yes, our CLASS scores will go up, too.

Learning Outcomes

- ◆ Participants will identify specific classroom strategies to support concept development in classrooms and to increase CLASS scores;
- ◆ Participants will identify and practice specific strategies for providing feedback to classroom staff to improve practices that support concept development;
- ◆ Participants will observe how support for concept development increases the quality of interactions (and therefore CLASS scores) across all domains;
- ◆ Participants will be able to describe the process by which children birth through five acquire concepts;
- ◆ Participants will describe the relationship between CLASS indicators/markers and school readiness goals as they apply to concept development; and
- ◆ Participants will identify the relationship between the CLASS dimension of concept development and other CLASS dimensions, including: behavior management, quality of feedback, language modeling, instructional learning formats, positive climate, teacher sensitivity, and regard for student perspectives.

SAMPLE AGENDA

DAY ONE (6 hrs) – High-Quality Interactions

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| Morning Session: | Concepts: What are They? How do Children Birth to Five Acquire Them? Concept Development: The CLASS and School Readiness Goals |
| Afternoon Session: | Classroom Strategies Authentic Communication Changing Old Habits |

DAY TWO (5 hrs) – Mentoring/Coaching and Providing Feedback to Improve Classroom Interactions

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| Morning Session: | The Mentoring Approach: Do Unto Teachers as You Would Have Them Do Unto Children Coaching and Peer Modeling: How Staff Can Improve Interactions by Watching Others |
| Afternoon Session: | Feedback Without Blame: Commitment to Change |

DAY THREE (3.5 hrs) – Systemic Change

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| Morning Session: | Daily Schedules Lesson Plans Ongoing Assessment Monitoring Performance Evaluations |
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