



## THE SUPERVISOR PLANNING GUIDE

### Promoting Effective Classroom Instructional Interactions

Changing the ways teachers interact with children is not easy. It takes time and a supportive relationship with a mentor, coach, or supervisor for teachers to enact changes in their practice. The National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning's **Framework for Effective Practice: Supporting School Readiness for All Children** (The NCQTL "House," Figure 1) represents four integral elements of effective teaching and learning: Engaging Interactions and Environments, Research-based Curricula and Teaching Practices, Ongoing Child Assessment, and Highly Individualized Teaching and Learning. The three blocks of the foundation include: *Social and Emotional Support*, *Well-organized Classrooms*, and *Instructional Interactions* (Figure 2). Engaging children in high quality instructional interactions can be particularly challenging. Teachers can benefit from focused professional development that promotes these interactions.

Framework for Effective Practice  
Supporting School Readiness for All Children

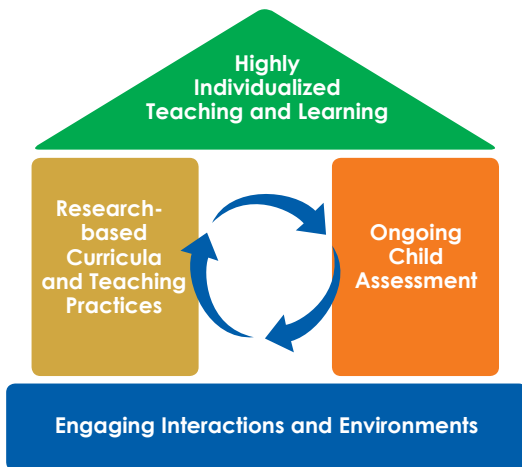


Figure 1

Instructional Interactions as Blocks  
of the House Foundation

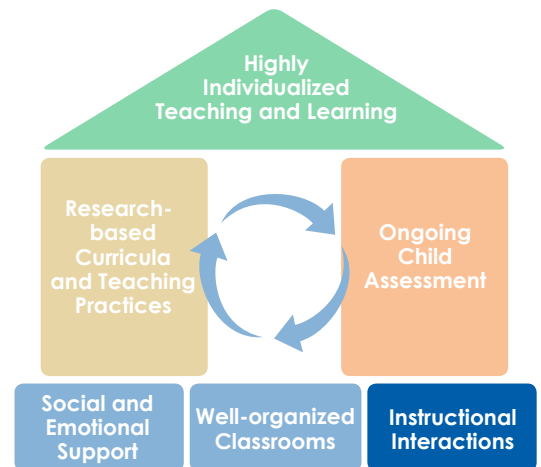


Figure 2

A step-wise process can be used to help teachers make meaningful changes in their teaching practices. These steps are: plan, observe, analyze, and assess. The *Instructional Interactions* block addresses teaching practices that support *Engaging Interactions* and *Language Modeling and Conversations*. This guide describes how this process can be used to enhance teaching practices related to *Engaging Interactions*. This process is a cycle that repeats itself over time as teachers focus on changing their interactions.

Helping teachers to improve their instructional interactions with children involves thinking about every interaction as an opportunity for learning and for providing instructional support. Teaching and learning take place through back-and-forth exchanges between teachers and children. Focusing on specific behaviors and conversations during classroom interactions is key to helping teachers improve their practice and foster children's learning. *Engaging Interactions* occur when teachers:

- **Foster children's thinking skills**
- **Provide feedback that supports engagement and learning**
- **Focus children on learning goals**
- **Scaffold children's learning**
- **Make learning meaningful**
- **Use the scientific method**

NCQTL has an in-service suite on each of these practices with video examples, learning activities and other supporting materials. In addition NCQTL has a series of in-service suites on *Language Modeling and Conversations* that address engaging in and extending conversations with children.

---

**PLAN:** The first step to help teachers make meaningful changes in their teaching practices is planning. To plan, sit down with a teacher one-on-one to discuss an area of focus. Discuss what instructional interactions look like in practice and brainstorm examples. NCQTL in-service suites can be used to provide examples of high quality instructional interactions. Brainstorm with the teacher how s/he can implement specific kinds of engaging interactions during different activities throughout the school day. Here are some examples of how in-service suites can support the planning process:

**Fostering Children's Thinking Skills:** *With the teacher, review the Fostering Children's Thinking in-service suite. Identify key strategies for engaging interactions that foster children's thinking using the scientific method, problem solving, and applying knowledge. Use the learning activities in this in-service suite to focus on specific strategies, such as brainstorming ideas for fostering children's thinking skills with engaging interactions throughout the day.*

**Providing Feedback:** *In reviewing the NCQTL Providing Feedback PowerPoint presentation and supporting materials, note that interactions include back and forth exchanges, encouraging children's efforts, and asking children to explain their thought processes. For back-and-forth exchanges, brainstorm the kinds of follow-up questions the teacher may ask (during a book-reading activity, in centers, and during meals) to discover whether the children have obtained a deep understanding of concepts and ideas. The learning activity on planning can help in this process. Watch video examples from this in-service suite and use the NCQTL Video Review Learning Activity to highlight how teachers provide feedback to support engagement and learning. Use the learning activity with scenarios to role-play and identify strategies for implementing engaging interactions in the teacher's practice.*



**OBSERVE:** The second step is observation. Conduct classroom observations focused on the targeted area. As you observe, take notes on specific teacher and child behaviors and conversations that take place. We highly recommend videotaping classroom interactions. This allows supervisors and teachers to watch the interactions together afterwards. It's very important as you observe to take specific notes about what you see—don't make judgments about the interactions, rather record exactly what is happening. This practice helps both teacher and supervisor focus on the content of observations without prejudice.

**Fostering Children's Thinking Skills:** As you observe during circle time, you may note a conversation such as:

Teacher: Friends, do we remember what book we read yesterday during story time?

Children: Johnny Appleseed!!

Teacher: Yes, that's right! We read about Johnny Appleseed and how he planted apple trees across America. Today we are going to look at some apples and learn a little about how they grow.

Teacher: (Gives out apples.)

Teacher: Let's all look at our apple halves. What do we notice? (**Scientific Method—Observing**)

Child: There are black things.

Teacher: Yes, I see black things too. Does anyone know what they are called?

Child: Seeds

Teacher: Yes, seeds. Do we eat seeds?

Children: NO!

Teacher: What do you think will happen if we planted these seeds? (**Scientific Method—Predicting**)

Children: We would have plants.

Lesson continues...

**Providing Feedback:** If you are observing during a meal, for example, write down detailed notes of what you see, the verbatim conversations, and note the strategy being used, such as:

Child: I will be 4 years old tomorrow.

Teacher: Your birthday is coming up soon. How do you know it's tomorrow? (**Asks child to explain his thought process.**)

Child: Mommy and I look on our calendar everyday and we count till we reach the birthday sticker.

Teacher: That's a great way to keep track! Today is Tuesday. What day is your birthday?

Child: Mommy said Thursday.

Teacher: What day comes before Thursday? ...Do you remember?... To help us, let's sing the Days of the Week song.

Back-and-forth exchanges continue...



**ANALYZE:** The next step to analyze the information is collected during the observations. Analysis is the process of taking a complex idea or process, such as teaching, and breaking it into smaller parts to gain a better understanding and improve it. Once observation has occurred, work with teachers in this analysis work. Encourage teachers to ask questions. Why did a particular interaction work or not work? What other factors may be influencing their tendency to interact with a child in a particular way? Analysis is most effective when it is an interactive process of reflection, an interactive process in which you and the teacher reflect together on what you saw, noticing both strengths and areas for growth. Encourage the teacher to be an active participant in this process. Discuss the actual interactions observed; what the teacher did or said, the children's response, and what the teacher did following this response. If possible, meet with the teacher and view a small portion of the video to watch the moment-to-moment interactions. Based on the above scenarios, here are examples:

**Fostering Children's Thinking Skills:** *In the above example about apples, you could ask the teacher to notice how s/he allowed the children to observe and predict. Talk about other times during the lesson where s/he could have asked the children to brainstorm or draw upon their previous experiences.*

**Providing Feedback that Supports Engagement and Learning:** *In the above conversation about a child's birthday, you could ask the teacher to notice how his/her comments and questions led to the child's response. Talk about other times during the meal where s/he could have provided feedback that supports engagement and learning.*

**ASSESS:** The final step in this process is to assess. Analysis leads to working with teachers to become more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses in classroom interactions. Self-assessment is most effective when teachers are focused on only one or two areas of teaching practice at a time. This allows them to focus attention on specific teacher-child interactions and enables them to develop more detailed plans of action for change. Talk with the teacher about ways in which the observed interactions demonstrate things s/he did well as well as areas for improvement. Below are a couple of assessment examples that expand on the above scenarios:

**Fostering Children's Thinking Skills:** *Review the video and your notes to point to the specific interactions where the teacher asked children to problem-solve, connected lessons to previous learning, or used the scientific method (see above exchange). Although the teacher let the children observe apples in the above exchange, there were missed opportunities as the teacher could have allowed them to talk more about their experiences with apples (e.g., what is their favorite apple treat, have they ever helped make applesauce, what kind of apples are their favorite, etc.).*

**Providing Feedback that Supports Engagement and Learning:** *After the observation and analysis, review the video, if available, and your detailed notes to identify specific examples where the teacher used back-and-forth exchanges and asked children to explain their thought processes (see the above exchange), as well as missed opportunities where specific feedback could have been provided. A child may have been confused during an activity, for example, and the teacher could have provided the child with additional comments and questions to support their understanding.*



**PLAN FOR CHANGE:** The cycle then begins again as the teacher makes a plan to change the way s/he is interacting in the classroom using the assessment and analysis of practice. As with the other steps, these plans work best if they are very specific and targeted on just one or two areas of teaching practice. This planning forms the basis for the next cycle of reflection. The area of focus may be the same or new depending on the teacher's needs.

The *NCQTL Planning in Your Classroom Learning Activity* for the specific area of focus can be used to help in the planning process. Based on the prior scenarios, here is an example of this step:

*Look at other ways to structure conversations or activities in the future. The teacher may talk about specific ways to ask more questions during activities planned for the following week. For example, in planning for story time, the teacher might review the book that she is planning to read, and place sticky notes on pages where back-and-forth exchanges make sense and note possible questions to expand learning. Create a clear and specific action plan with the teacher to continue improvement.*

Throughout your observations and work with teachers, remind them that these instructional interactions are associated with positive changes in children's learning. Their hard work will be reflected in children's progress. The same steps described above can be applied to other strategies used to increase instructional interactions. Using this supervisor tool along with the supplemental materials (including the in-service PowerPoint presentations, learning activities, *Tips for Teachers*, and *Helpful Resources*) can help guide your work with teachers.



For more information, contact us at: [NCQTL@UW.EDU](mailto:NCQTL@UW.EDU) or 877-731-0764

This document was prepared under Grant #90HC0002 for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Head Start, by the National Center on Quality Teaching and Learning.

FALL 2012