

Pedagogical Leadership: Moving Learning Forward

University of Wyoming Project ECHO

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Reflection on our work doesn't mean just thinking about what we do or talking about what we do. Reflection means being willing to see things in a new way and eagerly embrace positive change.

Reflection Questions:

- What can you add or change in your classrooms to motivate and inspire learning?
- How do you know if children have enough challenge during play?
- How can you better connect with and involve families?
- How can you increase the learning quality that's happening in your program?

Overall, the level of instructional support is medium to low, with very few classrooms of high quality – and even fewer classrooms of high quality across multiple years (Cash, Ansari, Grimm, & Pianta, 2019; Pianta, Downer, & Hamre, 2016). Instructional quality is especially low for toddlers and for programs serving children from low-income families (Ruzek, Burchinal, Farkas, & Duncan, 2013). Of concern are the lack of rich language interactions and adequately stimulating cognitive experiences. During large-group activities, there are mostly rote and low-level exchanges (e.g., basic information). During free choice play, there is little input. During meals and routines, only minimal talking or basic instructions are given (Goble & Pianta, 2017).

What does high-quality require?

- Learning looks spontaneous, but must be intentionally planned to foster deep understanding.
- Well-planned instructional support must be present with interactions that promote children's language and learning.
- Teachers look for well-used opportunities to engage children in higher-level thinking. They revise their strategies to ensure opportunities are not missed.

Take the seven week challenge. Focus on one topic with your colleagues each week:

1. How can you enrich interactions during routines?
2. How stimulating are play materials and experiences?
3. What can you add or do to be culturally responsive?
4. How are you individualizing learning to meet needs?
5. What will improve your setting and materials?
6. What else do you want to know about documentation and assessment?
7. How can you add rich conversations throughout the day?

Use conversation starters during meals, transitions, and caring routines to make the most of your interactions with children. These questions can jumpstart their thinking and meaningful engagement.

- **What did you learn when you went to the park (zoo, doctor, brother's game, aunt's house)?**
What did you see/do?"

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- **What do you think? How do you think?** “What do you think are the ingredients in our soup?” “How do you think the milk got from the cow to your cup?” “How do you think snow feels to a squirrel?”
- **Guess what I saw?** I saw six school busses in a row.” “I saw a building so tall, I had to look up to see the top.” “I heard a flock of geese honking.” “I saw a squirrel chasing a chipmunk.” (After this question, children will respond, “Guess what I saw?!”)
- **Did you know?** “Did you know a dog sleeps more hours a day than you do?” “Did you know cats see in the dark?” “Did you know there are 27 bones in your hand and 26 in your foot?”
- **How did it go? Tell me what happened.** When a family says a pet was taken to the veterinarian, be sure to follow up. Ask the child to tell you what happened. (Keep a 4 X 6 card to take notes so you don’t forget to ask!)

What encourages rich conversations? Use these strategies:

- Use specific words. “Put that there,” vs. Put the book on the shelf.”
- Describe what teachers and are children are doing.
- Add on information to what children say.
- Ask open ended questions. What can you tell me about___?
- Ask thinking questions. “How can you make your building get smaller at the top?” “How did you solve that?” “Why do you think that happened?”
- Provide props and modeling to add complexity to play.
- Create print-rich settings and introduce books for information. Rotate and match children’s interests. Point and ask questions about illustrations in books and displays.
- Rotate and include increasingly complex materials to match emerging skills. Ask children what else they need to support their play.

Get organized and stay inspired!

- **Take small steps.** Try one new strategy at a time. Small steps lead to big impact.
- **Set aside a dedicated time each week to prepare.** Add lesson planning to your calendar. You’ll “get on top” of the sequence of planning by dedicating time. Minimize last-minute work.
- **Keep a reflection journal.** Answer two simple prompts: “What did I do and how did it turn out?” And – “What did I observe and what did I learn?”
- **Talk to colleagues.** When teaching goes well, share your experience. When you need fresh ideas or support to overcome a challenge, reach out and connect. Grow together.

References:

Cash, A., Ansari, A., Grimm, K., & Pianta, R. (2019). Power of two: The impact of 2 years of high quality teacher child interactions. *Early Education and Development, 30*(1), 60–81.

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