

002370-Five Questions: Using CLASS to Support Effective Teaching

[music] Jennifer Boss: Hi. I'm Jennifer Boss. Welcome to "5 Questions: Using CLASS to Support Effective Teaching Practices and Quality Improvement."

Allyson Dean: My name is Allyson Dean. I'm the director of training and resource development for the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning.

Jennifer: So, how do teachers ensure effective interactions and teaching practices are happening, no matter the current setting?

Allyson: I think the thing to remember is that no matter where we are, what's happening in the world, where we're doing our teaching and learning, the things that children need have not changed. So, even while the world feels a bit out of control and ever-changing, children's needs remain consistent. They need warm, supportive relationships, they need something to be excited about and curious about, and they need a partner to help them learn more about the world around them. So, you know, regardless of where you are, continuing to really keep in mind what you know about children, making sure you have regular connections with them, whether that's virtual or in a physically distant, safe classroom, just continuing with that consistent relationship-building and making sure children know what's coming next and — and feel secure about what's happening in their environment is really — it remains the most important thing.

Jennifer: What are some strategies that teachers can use when they're planning virtual learning experiences to ensure their interactions are most effective for children?

Allyson: Well, I think, first and foremost, you know, again, creating something consistent and predictable for kids. So, if you're doing a — a little virtual session, you want to start and stop with the same sort of ritual. Whether that's a song or a greeting or a closing activity, you want that to be consistent. You definitely want to maybe lower your expectations and not be too hard on yourselves and realize that kids are going to squirm, kids are — some are going to be verbal and engage, and some maybe aren't going to be as verbal, and, really, keep it short and — and stay focused on maybe one thing that you're really hoping to do with kids. Don't try to do too much and — and just have fun. Remember, when you're on camera — I remember when I was in — in my baccalaureate program, I had a professor who said to me, "When you're doing a small-group activity, you are on stage. You've got to work it." [Laughs] "You got to keep them engaged." And sometimes that may feel exaggerated in a virtual environment, but — but that's probably what it's going to take to really get kids excited.

Jennifer: How does a teacher know if their interactions are in the mid or high range of the CLASS?

Allyson: Well, certainly, you want to always rely on the systems you've got in place, right? Maybe you've got a coach or an ed manager or supervisor that's — that's really regularly

observing you and giving you some feedback. That's first and foremost. But in your own mind, if you're thinking about it, what I like to tell folks is, if you're in the mid-range, you are probably doing most of the things outlined in the CLASS sometimes, occasionally. In the low range, you're probably rarely doing it or maybe never. In the mid-range, you're doing it sometimes. You know, most of the kids are getting that experience. Now, when you bump up to that high range, it's consistent and frequent. So, all children are experiencing it. It would be rare not to see those behavioral markers taking place, and most kids are having the same experience. So, again, there's that consistency. That's how I like to think about it when I work with teachers.

Jennifer: What can teachers do, then, to strengthen their instructional supports?

Allyson: I think, just like children, teachers learn best by seeing it in action. So, you know, taking advantage of some of the really great resources that we've put together that show video clips of teachers doing the practice. So, you can read a little bit about it, but then you see it, and then you go practice it and get some feedback, whether from a distance, using something like the Coaching Companion, where you can share video clips virtually with a coach or supervisor, or, you know, with — just with a peer that you trust, maybe your co-teacher. You can say, "Hey, I tried this virtual activity out this week. I'm not sure. I think it was a complete flop. Will you watch it and give me some tips?" Those types of things are really helpful.

Jennifer: What are some other resources you would suggest for educational leaders and teachers to access to help them learn more about effective practices and seeing those practices in action?

Allyson: So, I mentioned video, and we have the — a full range of what we call in-service suites, which is really like a kit of professional development tools. It's re — it's some tips. It's some video and some reflective questions. There's observation, some checklists and guidance for coaches and supervisors. Those suites are actually Crosswalks with the CLASS domain, so if you're an ed manager working with a teacher or you're a teacher who wants to really strengthen skill in a specific domain, you can look at that Crosswalk and see which in-service suites really talk about instructional learning formats and then go in there and explore. We also put together one page on the ECLKC sort of devoted to this topic. So, you'll find video, resources, tip sheets, as well as some little — like an animated vignette that really walk you through mostly instructional support, since that's where teachers struggle, but, really, a lot of those tips are universal across the domains. So, I'd start with ECLKC, and, remember, those things are free. You know, we've got resource libraries in the Coaching Companion, we've got the in-service suites, and they're all free for use, and so folks should take advantage of those.

Jennifer: Quick bonus question for you. What's the most important CLASS domain to focus on?

Allyson: Oh, gosh. That's a trick question because there isn't one! They're all important. I mean, people are so focused on instructional support because, of course, that's where we struggle, right? It's really hard to be in the moment, always thinking about what comes next, and it takes some planning. But — but in order to — to build in instructional supports, you've got to have a strong relationship, and that's all about the emotional support you set up. And you need —

Children need to know what the objective is of the learning that you — that you've got going on. They need, obviously, throughout learning, to be reoriented to the purpose of the activity, and that's in classroom organization. And, of course, behavior management so that children are really present and can take advantage of the learning. Those are all interconnected, and so you really can't pull them apart. I would say there is no one that's more important than the other. They're all important to kids. [music]