CLI engage

The Principal's Primer

Research-Based Supports for Early Learning Classrooms

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Planning for Tier 2 Intervention: Small Group Instruction

In pre-K and kindergarten classrooms, children may experience learning in a variety of contexts. Every moment of the day, even lining up, takes advantage of a teachable time with a planned transition to target skill development. Other daily instructional times include both large and small group settings.

Large group instruction refers to a time when children of various knowledge levels meet together with the teacher for valuable group learning experiences. Large group instruction is best used to introduce new concepts, model new procedures, and facilitate whole group classroom discussions.

In an early childhood classroom, small group instruction allows a teacher dedicated time to work with 3-5 students using an intentionally focused and planned activity to meet individualized instructional needs, and/or to meet a specific learning objective. In this smaller setting, children are able to have more intense skill practice; teachers can reteach a lesson and can reinforce or extend skills.

After children have been introduced to new concepts, centers or work stations offer the opportunity for children to put their new learning into practice. In learning centers, children can use newly learned vocabulary words and have higher quality verbal interactions with their peers; demonstrate a new skill independently; increase their social awareness and can promote literacy skills. Teachers may work with small groups of children while in centers, either in the defined center itself or at a table designated for small group while other children are occupied in center work and exploration.

The National Reading Panel (2000) cited, "When children are taught in small groups, their learning is greater than when they are taught individually or in large group instruction."

The use of smaller groups allows teachers to more easily identify which students are having difficulty understanding a particular concept. There is more one-on-one interaction between students and between student and teacher than is possible with larger groups. In most cases, this increases the potential for understanding.

Effective teachers knowingly plan for small group instruction, but use assessment data to modify instruction and target small groups to match lessons and materials to specific skill development needs.

Assessments from the CIRCLE Progress Monitoring System for pre-K and Texas Kindergarten Entry Assessment progress monitoring are used to collect data at three time points throughout the year on children's knowledge of concepts or skills, in order to determine each individual child's level of understanding. This simplistic yet reliable data collection prompts teachers to focus on lessons that target their students' least developed skill areas. The data is then evaluated and used in planning intentional instruction.

Early identification of learning needs and grouping children according to those needs is known to maximize instructional impact.

Use of data for intentional teaching leads a teacher being able to:
- Reflect on own practices
- Generate new strategies to reach students
- Make practical educational decisions
- Meet the needs of individual student's learning styles
- Determine and reevaluate previous decisions for effectiveness
- Ultimately, be a more engaged, effective, productive, confident, and happy educator (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 1999)

A joint position statement by the National Association for the Education of Young Children and National Association for Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (2003) stressed that "using ongoing assessment information to guide instructional decisions is a primary purpose of early childhood assessment and should be a component of a high quality early childhood program."

Thus, knowing that small groups are invaluable for children's effective learning, and starting with collected data to decide which children need more targeted instruction is critical, then it's important to approach small group planning quite methodically.

The Small Grouping Tool provides both a grouping report and recommended targeted activities for small groups. The grouping report breaks children into groups for teachers based on their assessment results. The groups contain children that have not yet reached the satisfactory level for each skill and fell below the benchmark for the measured learning domain. These children need more practice with certain skills and will benefit from small group instruction.

The grouping report automatically creates lists of supporting activities that are directly tied to the progress monitoring results; they are related to the skills with which the children need support. These activities are located in the CIRCLE Activity Collection on the CLI Engage platform.

The CIRCLE Activity Collection consists of activities in English & Spanish for pre-K/K teachers, infant and toddler teachers, and families to use with their own children. This extensive collection of teaching strategies and activities supports cognitive, social, and emotional learning. These activities are aligned with the Texas Prekindergarten Guidelines; kindergarten and first grade Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills; Infant, Toddler, and Three-Year-Old Early Learning Guidelines; and the Head Start Early Learning Outcomes Framework.

The collection contains more than 200 exemplar videos of real classroom teachers, scaffolds, as well as extension activities. The video teaching exemplars follow a scripted teaching cycle with on screen identification of key instructional behaviors. The videos use heavy scripting to cue the teacher to best instructional practices.

With this approach and these tools in hand, teachers can best address tiered instruction

and intervention.

Reference

Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, National Institutes of Health (NIH), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). (2000). Report of the National Reading Panel: Teaching Children to Read: Reports of the Subgroups (00-4754). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Gall, Joyce P., Gall, M. D., & Borg, Walter R. (1999). *Applying Educational Research: A Practical Guide* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Longman.

National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE). (2003). A Joint Position Statement: Early Childhood Curriculum, Assessment, and Program Evaluation: Building an Effective, Accountable System in Programs for Children Birth through Age 8. Retrieved from https://www.naeyc.org/sites/default/files/globally-shared/downloads/PDFs/resources/position-statements/pscape.pdf

Pointers for Classroom Visits

When you visit classrooms, here are some things to look for that may promote successful small groups:

Established signal for children's use
Teachers should have an established signal for individual children to interrupt and ask questions while working with other children in a small group. Some teachers have children use a signal for common things like going to the restroom or getting a drink so that they can just nod "yes" or "no" without stopping their lesson.

Balance between the teacher-directed and the child-directed time
Teachers should allow children who are in a Tier 2 small group some time (e.g., 10+ minutes) to work in centers before coming to small group. This provides time for a balance between the teacher-directed Tier 1 and Tier 2 lessons and the child-directed center time.

Teacher's tone of voice and overall demeanor
The teacher's tone of voice and overall demeanor should make the Tier 2 groups fun and engaging so children see it as a fun activity and a privilege.

"Effective leaders align and focus systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success, love of learning, the identities and habits of learners, and healthy sense of self."
(National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015, p. 12)

CLI Engage is part of the Children's Learning Institute at UTHealth
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