

Instructional Interactions: Motivating Teachers

Terri Wardrop: My name is Terri Wardrop. And my background in terms of -- I do have a tribal affiliation, French Canadian Black Feet. I am not a tribal member, but my grandmother certainly passed on a fierce pride for my heritage, so I wanted to include that today. In terms of my work and what I bring to here, I worked for 10 years with an organization called Committee for Children, and you may be familiar with the program called Second Step or Talking About Touching. I had worked on both of those. And once I got burned out and wanted to work more directly with children, I went to Head Start. So, I have over eight years in Head Start as both an Early Head Start and a Head Start teacher, disabilities coordinator, child care director. So, I've got lots of time in Head Start. And then of that eight years, I spent four with the Suquamish Tribe, and that truly was a privilege. I truly enjoyed that work; it was wonderful. I love the Suquamish Tribe. And then in the last 2-plus years, I've been working with NCQTL. And I worked extensively on the Beginning Teacher Series. And my hope is that you've heard of that and are beginning to figure out how you can use it with your staff.

Today, I want to highlight that we will not be offering specific training strategies, meaning that in the moment strategies you can use with one resistant participant. The idea for today is to look more deeply at how to motivate staff to want to attend trainings, to want to learn new practices, rather than just a simple resistance in a training. This is really looking at the big picture of how do you get people motivated, how do the people who are set in their ways, who might not have the best attitude around change? Well, part of the first step is cultivating your empathy, putting yourself in their shoes. This is a picture of me, because I have been a teacher and I have felt this way, where I'm barely balancing on the ball, barely keeping myself in the...maintaining some kind of balance.

And then there's two quotes here from Phil Strain and Dr. Gail Joseph. How direct service staff often feel overwhelmed, overworked, and disrespected. And then they also feel like they're being asked to do more with less and then not only take on more priorities. but also do the paperwork. So, the more you can put yourself in their shoes, acknowledge the feelings and the challenges that they face, that can open the door for the next step. So, let's look at the next step.

And this is going to look at what the research says in terms of looking at teacher professional development motivation. And I don't know if you want to get out a piece of paper and take some notes, because I will be asking you questions about this later on. So, this first one will not be a surprise, because you put it in your answers, that really your support of staff plays a key role in their attitude. You know, are there subs available? Do you have release time? Are you providing feedback? Because, you can't always get that release time, but you can do some observations of them and provide them with positive feedback. That makes such a difference. Are you talking to them about the professional development goals? And, of course, you mentioned this, too, in your chat box: Co-worker relations are very important. Are they getting feedback from their co-workers that is supportive?

And then you also mentioned this one: The availability of choices, decision-making power. You know, and sometimes they don't have a lot of decision-making power, but you can give them some. Meaning, you know, do you want one training every month on Friday for four hours, or do you want it to be spread out, two Fridays for two hours? So, there always can be some choice.

Just like before I did this webinar, I surveyed you. I asked you what you wanted to know more about in terms of instructional interactions. And that's why I'm doing this topic today, because you said this is what you wanted more information about. So, I went out and did some research and listened to what you were wanting. And then you also mentioned this in your own personal responses about what motivates you around change. Well, the research says that teachers are truly motivated when they see children changing as a result of the new practice. So, that's really exciting, that it makes a difference to teachers, a huge difference to teachers. And then here, this comes out of a survey that was done on about 300 preschool teachers. And, of course, any kind of structure that empowers them in some way makes a huge difference. And when they feel like the content meets a need that they have, they are on it.

And then this one is very important. It allows teachers to connect and share ideas. So, that there's some way that there's time in the training where other teachers can talk to each other. That is really a big motivator.

And then, that there's follow-up support. Do they have the specific either tool or material that they need? Is someone providing feedback on the practice? All right, so given all of this: How do we get to effective practice? It's not easy. Changing behavior is incredibly complex. This is a quote from one of the bigwigs in the early childhood field. It's kind of obvious that changing behavior is incredibly complex, but I found that out when I was in my 30s, because I was in an accident, and I hurt my neck, and I could no longer sleep on my stomach. It was a simple thing. I had to now sleep on my side, because it hurt to sleep on my stomach. But changing that behavior, even though everyone -- you know, my physical

therapist, my massage therapist -- was telling me that I needed to change the behavior, it was really hard to actually put into practice. When I would go to bed at night, I wanted to sleep on my stomach. And so, changing that behavior took a long, long time, longer than I would've thought. And it gave me a lot of empathy for how complex it is, even when you're motivated, even when you have to because it hurts. To really change that behavior is incredibly complex.

And I have a picture here of a teacher in circle time, in large group, and that's also another area that it took me a while to change my behavior. And that was I tried to teach things at large group. And really, large group, I learned over time, is not about teaching. You can introduce concepts, but really, large group is about, you know, building community and having fun and introducing ideas, but it's not about teaching. Small group is about teaching. And it took me a long time to really get that and really change my behavior, so that I wasn't trying to teach at circle time.

So, not only do we need to tap into the teacher's motivation to change, but we also need to give them time to learn the new strategies and offer trainings that really enable them to learn these strategies. And this comes out of research in the '90s. Fantuzzo is a great Head Start person, and he says -- and based on the research -- that teachers adopt new behaviors when they can observe a competent model. So, in your trainings, are you offering competent models that they can observe? Is there someone in your program that they can observe? And do the learning opportunities occur in the natural learning environment? Do they ever happen in the classroom? And do they get to practice skills and get supportive feedback either from a peer or from you? And do they receive support and encouragement from peers?

So, trainings really need, in order for teachers to gain the skills, they need these components. Because that has been a complaint of teachers, is that they're expected to get this stuff but not be able to learn how to do it. This comes out of the MyTeachingPartner research by Hamre, Downer, Jamil, and Pianta -- but there's Pianta and a bunch of others -- about how teachers learn new things. And this is very important, because it really does make a difference. make a difference.

So, the first thing that teachers need in order to really begin to change their practices is a deep understanding of the effective practice. And then they need to be able to really look at models -- either video examples or models in a neighboring classroom -- and to analyze and describe those models. Not just observe them, because looking at video, while it's interesting, is not enough. They need to be able to analyze what was the effective practice and maybe even think about why is it effective.

And then again, they need practice opportunities. And then that active examination, that's the reflection, where they're really looking at, okay, what was -- what about this practice do I do already? And then what do I need to change in my behavior? So, there's all kinds of research that really supports this: Learners who study and process examples deeply learn more. And that in the e-learning world, the world that the Beginning Teachers Series comes out of, they find really that processing of the examples is very important in order to adopt a practice. And then the other piece that is very important is how much are we asking of teachers, that cognitive load when we present information to them. Are we, you know, sequencing our content, segmenting and sequencing our content? And then, rather than saying: "Oh, you need to change everything you do and change it radically." How about, you know, you observe them and you're having a small shift in behavior.

And it sort of -- you know, teachers ask questions of kids all the time, and it's then saying, "Oh, you ask questions all the time. Can you ask how and why questions?" So, it shifts it just a little bit. And then, the other piece is to choose one strategy or skill to practice, and then, it can be one strategy and it can also be with one child. Rather than do this all the time, practice it, try it out. Sometimes, we, you know, I think set up the expectation of a lot, that they have to do everything and take it all on now.

So, we're going to shift to doing a poll, because I want more information from you. I want to know about -- here are some different strategies that are contained in two suites -- we're going to get to video later. And I want to know, in terms of your population, these strategies: Explain thinking or thought processes, ask "how" or "why" questions, provide links to previous activities to what they are doing now, in terms of learning, make predictions about what might happen, look for similarities and differences -- do the compare and contrast.

So, which of those do you think your teachers are going to have the most resistance to? And then look at the other side. Look at those strategies and think about which do you think they're going to have the least resistance to. I see a number of you are doing the "explain thinking or thought processes," that they're going to have a lot of resistance to that.

[Pause]

And then that there would be less resistance to asking questions and then providing links to previous knowledge and making predictions about what might happen.

[Pause]

So, depending on your population, your -- the teachers that you work with, you might want to start with either the -- you know, working on the strategy that they're most resistant to or begin that soft-pedal process of begin with the strategy you think they're going to have the least resistance to, that they're most open to learning and expanding their skill repertoire on. And that's definitely, an area where you can really think about your teachers and what's going to be most effective. I'm going to be asking you three questions. And based on that poll, I want you to think about the one that they're most resistant to.

So, what do you think will be motivating to your teachers to learn this strategy? And it looked like a lot of you answered the explaining the thought processes, explaining the thinking. So, what do you think will be motivating to your teachers? So, I see lots of you are typing and thinking about your answers. I see that understanding the benefits is a big one. And seeing how effectively the strategies support children. That makes -- can make a huge difference for teachers. All right, let's move on.

So, how do you empower your teachers? Or how can you empower them even more? So, what about this particular strategy would be empowering for your teachers, to motivate them or to empower them around choice? And then, a third question: How do you support your teachers? Or how can you support them even more? I love your answers. I see that you're really thinking a lot about these questions. Yeah, you all are really thinking well about your teachers. I like this.

All right, and here's some other ideas to motivate teachers. A quick survey of the PD content needs, the professional development content needs that your staff have. And that can be done paper, it can be done with SurveyMonkey, Live Monkey. There's a variety of different ways in which you can do that. And just like I surveyed you about what you were interested in and wanting. And then you can reach out to other programs. It can be internal.

You can do it, you know, with other classrooms in your Head Start program. But there are ways these days -- online, with conference calls -- and some programs are relatively close to each other, and you might even be able to do a field trip. And those kinds of times are -- teachers love that. And then acknowledge feelings. You all typed that one already. And then you also talked about this one: Accentuate the benefits for children. And highlight -- you talked about this a little bit, in terms of the feedback, but highlight what they're already doing and that it's not a huge change that you're asking. It's a small shift for a lot of them.

So, there's a few ideas about motivating teachers. And next we're going to be watching a video, and it will be an opportunity to put yourself in the teacher's shoes, because I'm going to ask a couple of questions that I want you to be in the mode of trying to think of what a teacher needs or how a teacher might perceive this.

So, as you watch this video, be thinking about how you would describe and analyze the skills you see. So, we want teachers to be able to describe and analyze what they -- the models that they see. So, if you were asked to describe and analyze the skills, what would you say? And then -- now switch hats; this is back to your program manager hat.

What types of questions do you think will encourage teachers to study and process these examples deeply? And if you have a pen and paper handy, that would be great. You can jot down any thoughts that come to you. We will have chat boxes for you to answer those questions after the video. So, here we go.

[Video begins]

Narrator: There are three main ways that teachers provide quality feedback or feedback that truly supports engagement and learning. This feedback occurs within the context of back-and-forth exchanges between the teacher and the child as they participate in a learning activity, whether it's a planned activity or an interaction that occurs during playtime or during routines. This is the kind of feedback that teachers use to expand on children's understanding.

One way that teachers provide good and useful feedback is by involving the child in meaningful back-and-forth exchanges. The teacher might make comments or ask probing questions that help the child go beyond a simple response and help the child elaborate on the concept or connect the knowledge with other things he or she already knows.

Teacher: What happens if we have ice over here and then the sun came out? How do you feel when the sun came out?

Girl: Uh, hot.

Teacher: Hot. So, the sun is going to make what?

Girl: Warm.

Teacher: It's going to warm. When the sun came out, you feel warm. So, the warm makes the ice what?

Girl: Warm. If -- if -- if...

Teacher: The sun makes the ice what?

Girl: Melt.

Teacher: To get hard or to -- to melt, very good. You thought about it!

Narrator: Another way that teachers provide feedback that supports engagement and learning is to ask children to explain their thought processes. Teachers can ask "how" or "why" questions or simply say, "Tell me a little bit more about that." Teachers use their attention and their questions and comments to show children that they are genuinely interested in what they know and how they know it.

Child: The blue box is the re-use trash, and the green box -- and the green trash box, is it trash?

Teacher: You were talking about the recycle bin.

Child: Uh-huh.

Teacher: Ahhh. What things do you put inside the recycle bin?

Child: Uh, paper?

Teacher: Paper, awesome. Can you think of anything else?

Narrator: And another way that teachers provide valuable feedback is by acknowledging and praising children's efforts. Teachers do this by paying attention, giving specific comments, and pointing out how the child or children are trying and making an effort. Encouraging effort is a useful method for helping children learn to persist in tasks or activities that might be a bit of a challenge.

Teacher: It's tough, but we've got to keep going. There you go. There you go, Elizabeth. You did it! Did your hands get sore? Hey, do you see -- look what you did! You got one, two, three, four pieces. Can I keep these? And I will show them to your mom when I meet her -- meet her again, okay? Finger bumps. Boop!

Narrator: There are many opportunities for teachers to provide effective feedback throughout the day and in a variety of activities. In the context of almost any interaction, the teacher can encourage, ask questions, and keep taking turns to help the child more fully understand the concept, practice the skill, or apply their learning to new situations. Teachers need to be keen observers and careful listeners, so that they can add a turn to the interaction that supports children's learning.

This short presentation highlighted the ways that teachers can provide feedback that supports children's engagement and learning. Three strategies were described that teachers can use when interacting with children to expand on their understanding. Please see our tips and tools and helpful resources that accompany this presentation, providing feedback that supports engagement and learning. Thank you for listening.

[Video ends]

Terri: All right, there are two chat boxes down there for you. And if you can describe the skills as if you were a teacher watching this; what skills did you see and any analysis of those skills. And then what questions -- as a program manager, what questions could you ask teachers to encourage them to study and process these examples deeply? Again, I will try to be quiet and allow you to answer. I see some really good answers coming up there in the describing the skills: Getting down on their level, asking open-ended questions, praising the completion of an activity. I see you have moved on, many of you have moved on to thinking about the probing questions that you might ask some of your teachers to help them process these examples. All right, let's move on.

Now, going deeper. The other part that's important is when teachers do begin to get motivated, be ready with resources to support them in their motivation that go even beyond what the NCQTL in-service suites do. And here's one example. "Powerful Interactions;" it's a book. I've done a little review of this book myself and put on my teacher hat, and I like this book a lot from a teacher's perspective. It has lots of quick strategies and then examples of the strategies. And that's really helpful. So, there's one strategy in there that I really like. It's called mirroring, and it's where you use mirror talk with a child. And what it means is that you're simply reflecting back to a child what they are doing or what you hear him or her saying. And it gives them specific, detailed information about what they are doing and saying, and this feedback helps children become more aware of their own thinking.

So, this could be, for some of those who might resist asking children to explain their thought processes, mirror talk sometimes is a doorway into that strategy. All right, we're going to be moving on here and going to another video. And this is an opportunity to explore some more, and this time I want you to be thinking in your program manager hat, you know, how you will offer teachers choices, how you will encourage them to exchange ideas and give opportunities to practice.

So, there -- the strategies that you see, how are you going to help them feel like they have a choice around those strategies? And then what small shifts in teacher behavior will lead to better outcomes for children? So, as you are watching the video, you know your teachers, and you can feel like, okay, teacher X might need to shift this way, or teacher Y might need to shift in that way. So, be thinking about the small shifts. And I think we're ready to watch the video.

[Video begins]

Narrator: Teachers have many, many interactions with children every day. By taking advantage of these interactions, teachers can maximize children's learning. What does it mean to foster children's thinking skills? It means that teachers engage in interactions with children that support and guide children's understanding and deepen children's knowledge about their surroundings. In this module, we focus on three methods that teachers can use to foster children's thinking and to help them learn more about their world.

One way that teachers advance children's thinking is to lead activities and experiences that provide opportunities to use the scientific method. Teachers can help children use the basic elements of the scientific method. They help children observe carefully. They help children predict or make a good guess about what will happen in the future. And they help children experiment to see whether or not their prediction was accurate.

Another way that teachers foster children's thinking is to help children use problem-solving. Teachers provide activities and experiences that set the stage for children to brainstorm or think about lots of ideas, to plan, and then to carry out a plan.

Teacher: Oh, maybe take some journals out from the bottom. That's an idea. Okay, should we try now?

Child: Yeah.

Teacher: Is it ready? Oh, Max! That was the trick. That worked.

Narrator: A third method that teachers can use to foster children's thinking is to help children apply their knowledge. Teachers take note of children's curiosity and interest and then take advantage of their interest to help children connect everyday experiences to their prior knowledge.

Teacher: Brown...

Child: Brown, green, brown, green, brown.

Teacher: Ah, what comes next?

Child: Green.

Teacher: Green.

Narrator: There are many opportunities for teachers to foster children's thinking throughout the school day in a variety of activities and routines. Teachers need to be purposeful in their planning, so that these opportunities are productive for children.

The three methods that have been described can be used to increase the quality of teacher-child interactions to support learning in the domains of the Head Start framework. This module highlighted the ways that teachers can foster children's thinking. Teachers can plan learning activities and experiences to help children learn to use the scientific method, problem-solve, and apply their knowledge. See our longer module on Fostering Children's Thinking for additional tip sheets, guides, and resources. Thank you for listening, and have fun helping your children learn.

[Video ends]

Terri: All right, we're going to move on to the next slide. And this is the review and summary. So, what concepts today did you find helpful? That change in children as a result of new practice is a motivator. There's a whole list of them there: giving teachers choice, time to exchange ideas, ways to analyze examples, start with one strategy/one child. All right, we're going to move on.

I'm going to be asking you to think about your plans. And the first part of this is just to reflect. Take a moment before you type anything to reflect first or actively examine your behavior, to do what we ask teachers to do. Reflect on your practice and what you are currently doing. And then when you've had a chance to do that, I want you to think about three things that you can do tomorrow. I see that multiple attendees are typing. That's great. I see some wonderful answers appearing. You are all being so thoughtful about, you know, how to really motivate teachers.

Well, thank you for today. I really have been quite appreciative of your participation today, and seeing your answers and your thoughtfulness. It's really quite gratifying to see that.