

# CLASS Feedback Best Practices: Six Principles of Effective Feedback

## Introduction:

The most effective feedback does more than convey information; it ideally promotes teacher engagement, reflection, and motivation to grow his/her practice. The following research-based practices are provided to help feedback providers reflect on their practices, and, in parallel with teachers, hone their craft for maximum impact. On the coming pages, each principle is unpacked, and specific strategies are provided to support you in giving feedback in the most impactful and helpful way possible for the teachers you support.

## Six Principles of Effective Feedback



**1. Supportive, Positive Relationships**



**2. Specific, Observable/Behavioral, and Non-Judgmental**



**3. Shared Lens and Language**



**4. Targeted Areas of Strength, Manageable Areas of Focus**



**5. Teachers as Active Participants**



**6. Clearly Articulated Goals and Action Steps**



## #1 Feedback is best received in the context of Supportive, Positive Teacher/Feedback-Provider Relationships

Just as interactions and relationships are key to successful learning environments for children, teachers need to receive feedback and support within the context of a supportive and safe environment.

### Strategies:

- **Focus on the positive:** Most people need to hear positive feedback in order to even begin to listen to more critical feedback. Teachers are no different. In fact, teachers are often exceptionally critical of their own teaching and they need help seeing the things they are doing well. Focusing on the positive is one important way to make sure you are establishing a safe and supportive relationship with teachers.
- **Be supportive:** Some teachers will quickly adopt the CLASS lens and will come to the feedback session prepared to evaluate their teaching practice. Others will have difficulty speaking openly and being objective about their classroom interactions. The presence of a supportive teacher/feedback-provider relationship is key to encouraging self-evaluation, as few teachers are likely to open up if they feel they are being judged. The goal, over time, is to enable teachers to engage in ongoing self-evaluation of their practice with the CLASS continuing to serve as the shared framework.
- **Reframe/promote a growth-mindset:** If a teacher takes issue with what the CLASS report indicates (e.g., feels the observation wasn't representative of her typical teaching, pushes back on areas identified as areas with room for growth, etc.), it is important to listen to those concerns, ("you're disappointed that this score is lower than you hoped") but also try to reframe to ensure this can still be a useful feedback session. Remind teachers that even those of us who are master teachers always can find areas where we can think about growth. If the teacher was receptive to the Teacher-Child Interactions Self-Assessment process, and her own reflections and areas of focus that she self-identified do not align with the CLASS report, then support her to consider how she could still focus on growth in an area she already selected. Try not to get pulled into discussions about the accuracy or validity of the CLASS observation during this meeting. Instead, try to pull the teacher's own ideas about her classroom practices into the conversation.

- **Provide challenge:** While remaining positive during feedback sessions is critical, it is also important to provide structure and challenge to help teachers improve their teaching practice. A goal of feedback sessions is to heighten teachers’ awareness of the types of interactions they have with their students and the effects of those interactions on their students’ social and academic outcomes. Therefore, it is also important to spend time reviewing the aspects of the observation that presented room for growth. When more challenging feedback is provided within the context of a supportive relationship, it can actually enhance the quality of the relationship and the teacher is able to see the feedback-provider as a non-evaluative, helpful partner.



## #2 Specific, Observable/Behavioral, Non-Judgmental Observations

Mirror the CLASS tool in the ways you discuss teaching practices in the teacher’s classroom. Work to call the teacher’s attention to the behavioral examples in the report and to use specific language about her teaching as opposed to speaking about interactions using broad generalities. The more drilled-down and specific the discussion, the more impactful it will be for your teachers.

### Strategies:

- **Avoid using generalities:** It is easy to get stuck having higher-level discussions about teaching and learning (e.g., “I try to make sure the kids like being in my classroom”) as opposed to more specific and targeted discussions, (e.g., “This is one specific way I try to make sure the kids feel connected to me and safe – I greet each one every morning with eye contact, a handshake, and some sort of statement about being happy to see them or happy they are at school.”) The more you can model talking about teacher-child interactions in specific behavioral terms, the more you will guide your teachers to do the same thing as they think about and discuss their teaching.
- **Use report examples:** The examples that were pulled out of the CLASS observations and are highlighted in the classroom-level CLASS Reports are written in an objective, behavioral and non-judgmental manner. It is important to call the teacher’s attention to the “why” behind the trends that are highlighted in the CLASS report. Be sure to call their attention to specific examples and support them in thinking about how representative the examples are of the types of daily interactions they are having with their students specific to that particular dimension of the CLASS.

- **Model nonjudgment, objectivity and acceptance:** Avoid subtle messaging that teachers scores suggest a teacher is “good” or “bad.” Redirect away from ‘reading in’ too much to a score. Stay grounded in what the score means about the interactions (how often certain kinds of interactions happened) and what the positive effects are (or could be) for students. For example, start the feedback session by acknowledging that viewing data can feel overwhelming, and reminding the teacher that these observations are not being used in an evaluative manner. E.g., “I know that data can feel intimidating and that getting feedback from someone can feel scary. I want you to know that we’re using this data in a non-evaluative manner. Every teacher has strengths and room to grow. Our goal with this work is to use feedback to help support every classroom to maximize interactions with children. This data will help us shine a light on what you’re already doing well and give you choices to decide where you might want to grow.”



### #3 Shared Lens and Language

Feedback will be most helpful if it is targeted on specific areas of practice known to relate to children’s social and academic development. The CLASS provides a common lens and language for the teacher and feedback provider to come back to across feedback sessions. By adopting the CLASS as a shared lens and language teachers and feedback providers remain on the “same page” when it comes to discussing dimensions of interactions in the classroom. If teachers are going to improve the quality of their interactions with students around the key emotional, organizational, and instructional domains of the CLASS, they are best supported when the feedback they receive explicitly call the teachers’ attention to the components of the CLASS.

#### Strategies:

- **Use CLASS Language:** Consistently use the language of the CLASS – calling attention to domains, dimensions, and then examples that fall into each from the observation report. Continue to use the lens and language of the CLASS in future discussions about teachers’ practice and in future feedback sessions.
- **Work to hone your own CLASS lens.** Through CASTL-provided supports or other types of professional development targeted at division leadership, continue to improve your own knowledge of the CLASS lens so you can continue to support your teachers as they

learn this tool and use it as a framework for improving their daily interactions with children.

- **Provide continued support for CLASS learning:** Through the provision of professional development, support your teachers to also continue to improve their knowledge of the CLASS lens. The CLASS is a complex and nuanced tool. Look for continued opportunities to help teachers grow both their CLASS knowledge and skills.



#### **#4 Targeted Areas of Strength, Manageable Areas of Focus**

Though it can be tempting to guide teachers to work to improve multiple areas of their practice at once, teachers will actually get the most out of feedback when it helps to guide them to a manageable area of focus. It is important to help teachers build confidence and competence in one area before moving on to the next. For this reason, during a feedback session with a teacher, we recommend focusing in on one or two specific areas of focus. This allows teachers and consultants to explore the dimension at a greater depth and come away with more specific ideas for potential modifications to practice.

#### Strategies:

- **Plan ahead:** As you review the CLASS observation report in preparation for the feedback session, pull out a couple of key areas that you think might be good areas of focus for each teacher. Use both the information from the report and your existing knowledge of the teacher’s interactions with his/her students as a guide. Keep in mind however, that the teacher might focus on an area that you hadn’t anticipated as a first area of focus – and that’s OK too.
- **Ask teachers to plan ahead too!** Using the Teacher-Child Interactions Self-Assessment, teachers will reflect on their areas of strength and areas with room for growth ahead of receiving their CLASS reports and ahead of the feedback meeting. This exercise will enable the teacher to come to the meeting better prepared to discuss “glows and grows” and already have narrowed in on a few areas of the CLASS to learn more about or focus on for growth. Use this information and this growth mindset of the teacher as you focus on celebrating successes and opening up discussions about growth.



## #5 Active Teacher Role

A collaborative approach to feedback meetings is key, where teachers feel equally responsible for making feedback meetings productive and meaningful. When an active effort is made to empower teachers in the process, they are much more likely to deeply engage and be receptive to feedback and opportunities for growth. You can empower teachers to take an active role in a number of key ways.

### Strategies:

- **Support autonomy:** Work to develop collaborative relationships in which teachers feel equally responsible for making feedback sessions productive and useful. Teachers will make the most progress when those providing feedback make an active effort to empower them in the process. This process of empowerment often occurs over time, which suggests that having more than one feedback session with teachers is ideal. One indicator of successful feedback meetings is when teachers bring their own ideas about aspects of their teaching on which they would like to focus to their meetings.
- **Ask questions and listen actively to teachers:** It is important to ask teachers what areas of their practice they want to work on. Most importantly, feedback providers should listen to and honor the areas of interest for teachers. Use the Teacher-Child Interactions Self-Assessment to guide your discussions along with the CLASS report. Invite the teacher to share ideas and concerns and follow her lead as she does. If teachers are not doing much talking or sharing, ask questions to continue to pull in their ideas.

For example:

#### Questions to ask during review of data:

- What do you notice here? What stands out to you?
- What do you make of these patterns?
- How is this similar to your own self-assessment? What's different-- what surprised you?

#### Questions to ask while planning for next steps:

- What area of interactions do you want to focus on going forward – why?
- What ideas do you have about how to focus on this area in your classroom?
- What are you already doing that you want to keep doing, or do a little more?

- What do you want to learn more about before you try out something new related to this area?
- How can I help? How may I support you to learn more about this area and put some new strategies into action?



## #6 Goals and Action Steps Clearly Identified

In order for feedback sessions to make an impact on teacher practice, teachers should leave the session with a clear plan-- at least 1 action or even a series of steps or approaches they can immediately begin to put to use. Saving time at the end of a feedback session for the teacher and feedback provider to work on the action plan is critical.

### Strategies:

- **Articulate clear, specific, doable actionable steps – such as SMART goals.** If steps are too ambitious or too general, they will not be easy for teachers to take right into their classrooms and put them into action. (Think “SMART” goals!) Think ahead and then brainstorm together during your feedback session about the next steps that seem most valuable to the teacher and an achievable next step in the learning trajectory. Aim for actions that are both worthwhile doing and indeed doable-- from the teacher’s perspective and yours (based on your knowledge of the teacher’s skills, strengths, and motivations.)

SMART Goals – Smart, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely

- **Think of actions that help teachers KNOW, SEE, and then DO interactions.** We often think about action steps being divided into three progressive categories: Know, See, and Do. Teachers often need to gain more knowledge in order to effectively shift or improve the quality of their interactions. Also, teachers often need to see real-life examples of challenging practices (e.g. feedback loops) before being able to implement effectively themselves.

**KNOW** – It’s important to know about child development, why and how teacher-child interactions matter, and which teacher-child interactions are most impactful. You and the teacher might decide that one action step should involve knowing or learning more about one aspect of teacher-child interactions.

Options for KNOW Action Steps:

- Read a teacher-friendly article about interactions.
- Learn more about effective teacher-child interactions [online](#), using the CASTL-provided CLASS [handout](#), or using the CLASS Dimensions Guide provided at the 2019 Spring Coordinator meetings.

**SEE** – It is also important for teachers to be given the opportunity to see effective teacher-child interactions in their own or other teachers’ classrooms.

Options for SEE Action Steps:

- Watch targeted videos highlighting effective interactions using the CLASS framework - <https://aeiionline.org/advancing-effective-interactions-and-instruction-2/tools-resources/for-use-in-professional-development/instructional-video-library/>.
- Observe a colleague and note the interactions that seem most effective.
- Videotape and observe one’s own teaching with a focus on only one CLASS dimension.

**DO** – Finally, it is clearly critical that teachers can take their knowledge and understanding about effective interactions and put them into practice in their classrooms. Think SMART-- Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely.

Options for DO Action Steps:

Identify a specific interaction strategy to put into place over the coming few weeks – for example:

- Practice asking open-ended, higher-order type questions during daily book readings. (Try for three, then more; then extend to other times of the day)
- Begin a *Question of the Day* routine with your students that engages them during your morning meeting and pushes them to think deeply.
- Plan to learn one new in the next week thing about each of the three children with whom you have had a hard time connecting in order to get to know them better and show them that you are interested in who they are.
- Post a simple feedback log on your wall and use it for a week – have one column where you’ll put a check mark each time you provide feedback that is focused on correctness, and another where you check each time you provide feedback that pushes to more questions or deeper learning. Try to keep increasing the number of checks in the second column.

AEII has additional [Know, See, Do Resources](#) on our website.