

Examination of a Tier 1 Intervention to Increase Meaningful Engagement in an Adult Day Habilitation Program

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MayInstitute
SHAPING FUTURES. CHANGING LIVES.

About us

Daniel Bellow

- PhD from WVU, 2018
- At May Institute since 2023
- Adult Services for past year
- Work in residential services, but spend a lot of time at our Revere Day Program



Brenna Anderson

- PhD from WNEU, 2025
- Worked in children's residential, early intervention, and school settings
- May Institute, adult services since 2024
- Split time between residential and day habilitation sites



About May Institute

- In our 70th year
- More than 130 service locations, including X residential homes in adult divisions and 5 day habilitation sites
- Adult services primarily funded through Medicaid waivers
- Operations are guided by a foundation of standards that have evolved over years of strategic planning, including elements as defined by funding agencies



Poll

- In what setting do you primarily work?
- What diagnosis do you primarily serve?
- What is your current experience with adult long term support services?



[Results](#)

Project Origins

- With the focus on our commitment to high-quality, person-centered care it is our **universal** expectation that staff are implementing meaningfully engaging activities with the individuals we serve – but how do we actually get there?
- We started with a Tier 1 intervention, with several primary goals
 - Increase staff engagement
 - Focus on engagement in activities that are **functional** and **meaningful**
- What do we mean when we say “meaningful”?

Meaningful Engagement

Meaningful Activities have a **purpose** and enhance **quality of life** by:

- 1. Skill-building:** build skills for daily life, like communication, washing hands, and doing chores
- 2. Age-appropriate:** activities that people their age like to do
- 3. Enjoyable:** We can see that the person likes what they are doing



Meaningful Engagement

- Focus on real-life outcomes – work, independence, community
- Teach in natural settings so skills generalize
- Set individual, person-centered goals tied to QoL
- Provide tools for any discipline
- Teach the right skills, in the right ways



Meaningful Engagement

Functional goals:

- Will reduce dependence on others
- Lead to accessing favorite things and activities

Long-term impact:

- skills relevant 3-5 years in future
- for living, home, community, employment in adulthood



Meaningful Activities

Meaningful activities are comprised of **adaptive skills** or **leisure with choice**.



Gerhardt & Bahry (2024)

Meaningful Activities

Adaptive skills activities involve learning or practicing skills related to independence, such as:

- Hygiene
- Self-care
- Mobility
- Cleaning
- Money management
- Emotional regulation
- Social skills
- And so on...



Gerhardt & Bahry (2024)

Meaningful Engagement and Social Validity

Meaningful Engagement is a way to integrate social validity into daily practice by:

- Increasing independence in daily routines
- Maintaining acquired skills throughout the lifespan
- Discovering or enjoying leisure activities
- Maximizing availability of choices
- Teaching those without language skills to self-advocate

An important role of a day habilitation program is to increase quality of life!

Make it Meaningful!

Discussion time

- Scenarios of possible activities in an adult day program
- Scan QR and introduce ideas to make the scenarios more meaningful or engaging



Make it Meaningful

It is independent leisure activity time. A staff member tells the client to “Grab a puzzle.” The staff does not physically walk over to the client's area during the activity to provide a check-in. Staff does not speak to the client except to remind them that they “need to do their puzzle.”



[Question 1](#)

Make it Meaningful

It's a beautiful Summer day, and staff are able to hold a cookout for the clients. The staff take the clients outside and hand out some outdoor games (ex. Soccer ball). While staff cook lunch on the grill, some of the clients play games. Most of the clients sit at a table and do not play any games.



[Question 2](#)

Make it Meaningful

Staff tell the group that they are going on a ride to the Dunkin drive-through. While in the drive-through, the staff member orders all the food and drinks for the clients. The group then heads back to the program to enjoy the refreshments.



[Question 3](#)

Make it Meaningful

Staff retrieve the lunches for the clients out of the fridge. The staff put the food on a plate, heat it up, collect utensils, and bring the food to the clients. The staff then pours water in glasses and gives them to the clients.



[Question 4](#)

Orientation to current study

- ME training has been conducted in three other May Institute day programs
- The training included:
 - Examples and nonexamples of meaningful activities
 - Classroom schedules
 - Didactic instruction on the importance of ME
 - A system of spot checks to track ME and provide feedback to staff
- The current study conducted a component analysis of this training

Orientation to current study

- Study conducted with existing organization-wide training
- Personnel include:
 - Direct support professionals (non RBTs, high school/GED level)
 - Day habilitation service managers (high school/GED or bachelor's level)
 - Day habilitation director (bachelor's or master's level, non BCBA)
 - Clinicians (master's or Ph.D. level, BCBA)
- Training & monitoring systems meant to operate at site level

Design

Nonconcurrent Multiple Baseline

- Component 1: List of Meaningful Activities
- Component 2: Classroom Schedules

Pre-Post Within Subjects

- Component 3: Meaningful Engagement Didactic Training
- Component 4: Spot checks with feedback

Design

- Independent Variables (components)
 - “List of Activities” job aid
 - Classroom schedules
 - Didactic training
 - Spot checks and feedback
- Dependent Variable
 - Meaningful engagement (momentary time sample)



Data Collection

- Meaningful engagement spot checks
 - Assesses engagement in meaningful activities
 - Momentary time sampling of whether a meaningful activity is ongoing
 - Randomized times 3x/week when practical
- Interobserver agreement was collected on 18% of sessions and averaged 90% agreement

Individual Engagement Spot Check

Date: _____

Time: _____

Name of Observer: _____

Primary/Reliability

Momentary Time Sampling: Score the activity the learner is engaged in immediately upon entering, even if the activity changes during the time you are in the classroom

Class:	Name:	Meaningful Engagement:				Activity:
		Yes	Partial	No	Absent	
Class 4		Yes	Partial	No	Absent	
		Yes	Partial	No	Absent	
Class 9		Yes	Partial	No	Absent	
		Yes	Partial	No	Absent	
Class 7		Yes	Partial	No	Absent	
		Yes	Partial	No	Absent	
Total:						Out of ____ observed

Yes (They are engaged in a meaningful activity)

- Activities related to increasing independence, building skills, or health and hygiene: *Preparing a meal, eating independently, walking/exercise, brushing teeth.*
- Leisure activities typical for people their age: *Reading, arts/crafts, writing, dancing, singing, painting nails, playing cards*

Partial (They are engaged with staff and/or a non-functional activity, but not in a meaningful activity)

- *Sorting objects, repetitive actions with toys, watching staff complete chores without helping*

No (They are not engaged in any activity or with staff)

- *Sitting in front of empty table, sitting in front of activity without engaging*

Components

COMPONENT 1: LIST OF ACTIVITIES

- Provide staff with a list of meaningful activities at the individual level
- Implemented as a job aid, via a handout in the individual's binder
- Job aid was delivered with minimal instruction on meaningful engagement

Meaningful Activities

Our role as employees at the May is to help our learners enjoy life and build or maintain skills.

Meaningful Activities have a **purpose** and enhance **quality of life** by:

1. **Skill-building:** Build skills for daily life such as: communicating, washing hands, doing chores
2. **Age appropriate:** Is an activity that people their age like to do
3. **Enjoyable:** We can see that the person likes what they are doing

Engaging in meaningful activities:

1. Is a **choice**
2. Can be done **alone or with others**



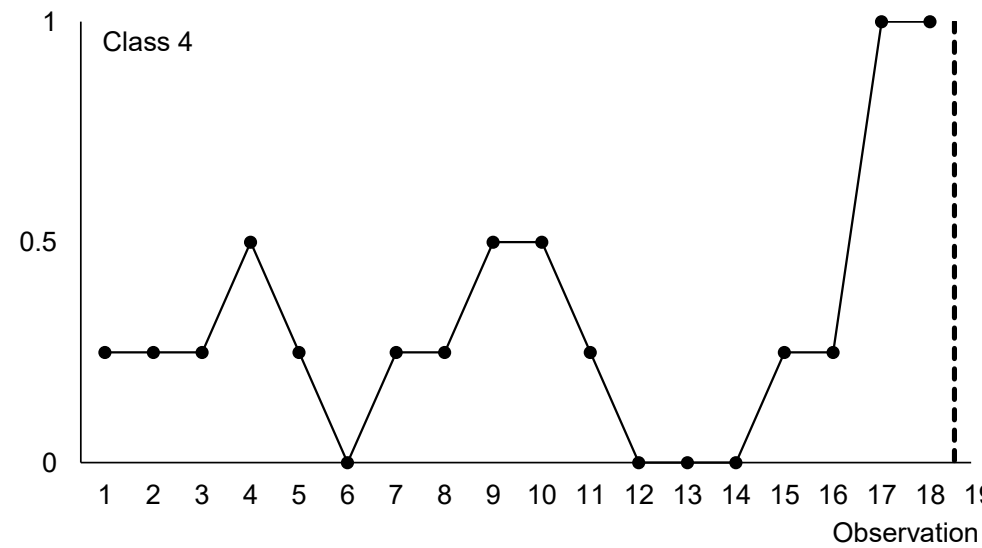
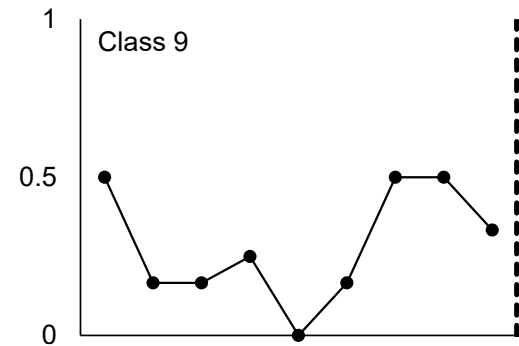
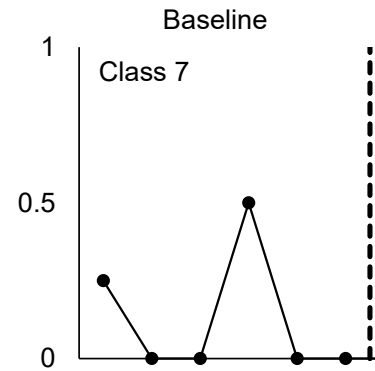
Some Meaningful Activities that might like:

Exercise	<i>*Walking *Soccer *Exercise Mats *Treadmill *Stationary Bicycle *Yoga *Basketball *Medicine Ball *Bean Bags</i>
Dance party	<i>Play music and encourage dancing, singing, or picking songs</i>
Cards & Games	<i>Play card games with the learner, teaching them the rules that are within their abilities *Uno *Go Fish *Bingo *War</i>

Results

Baseline

- Most scores at or below .5



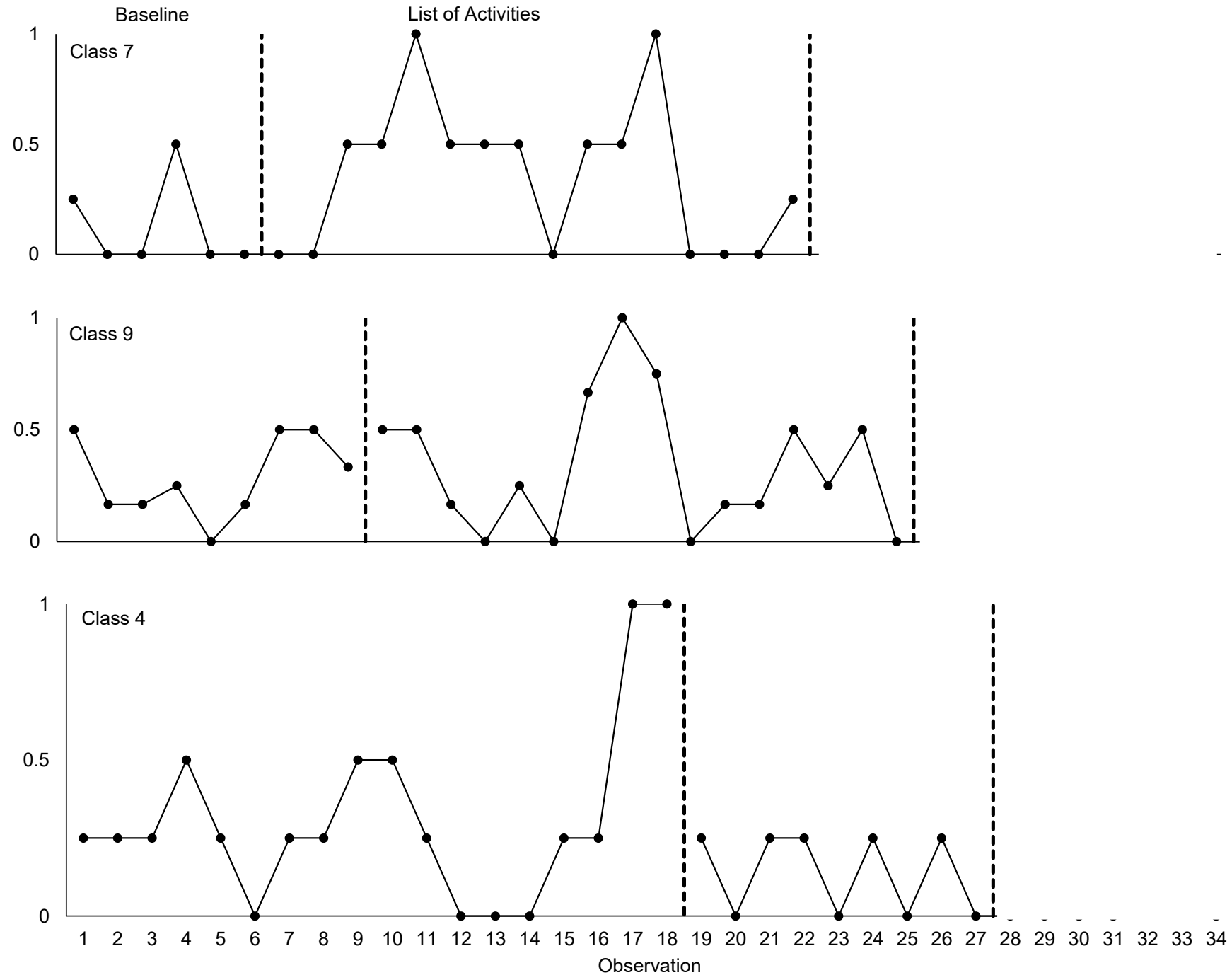
Results

Baseline

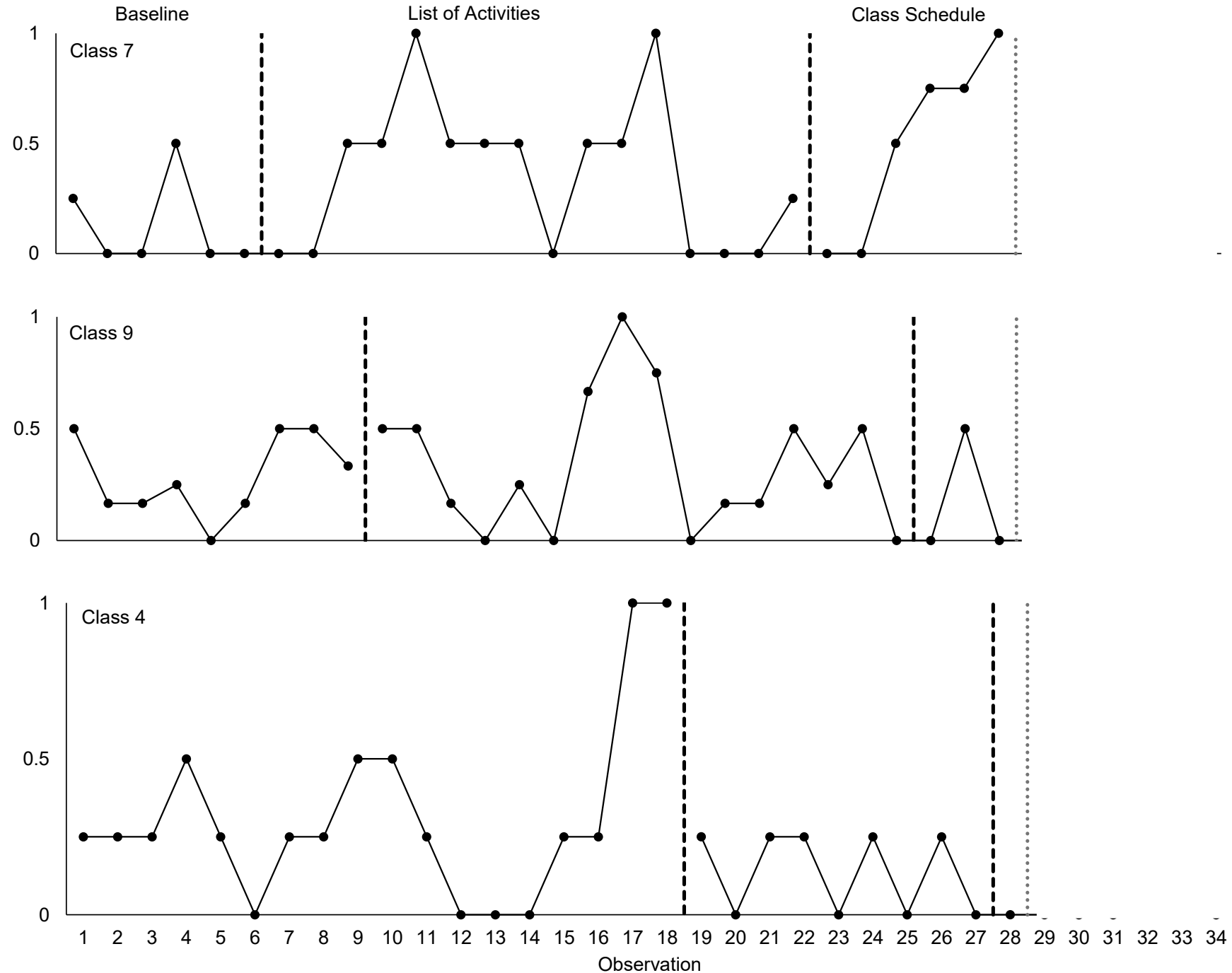
- Most scores at or below .5

Activities Handout

- Class 7: Increase
- Class 9: No difference
- Class 4: Decrease



Results



Baseline

- Most scores at or below .5

Activities Handout

- Class 7: Increase
- Class 9: No difference
- Class 4: Decrease

Class Schedule

- Class 7: Increase
- Class 9: No difference
- Class 4: Initial decrease

Results

Baseline

- Most scores at or below .5

Activities Handout

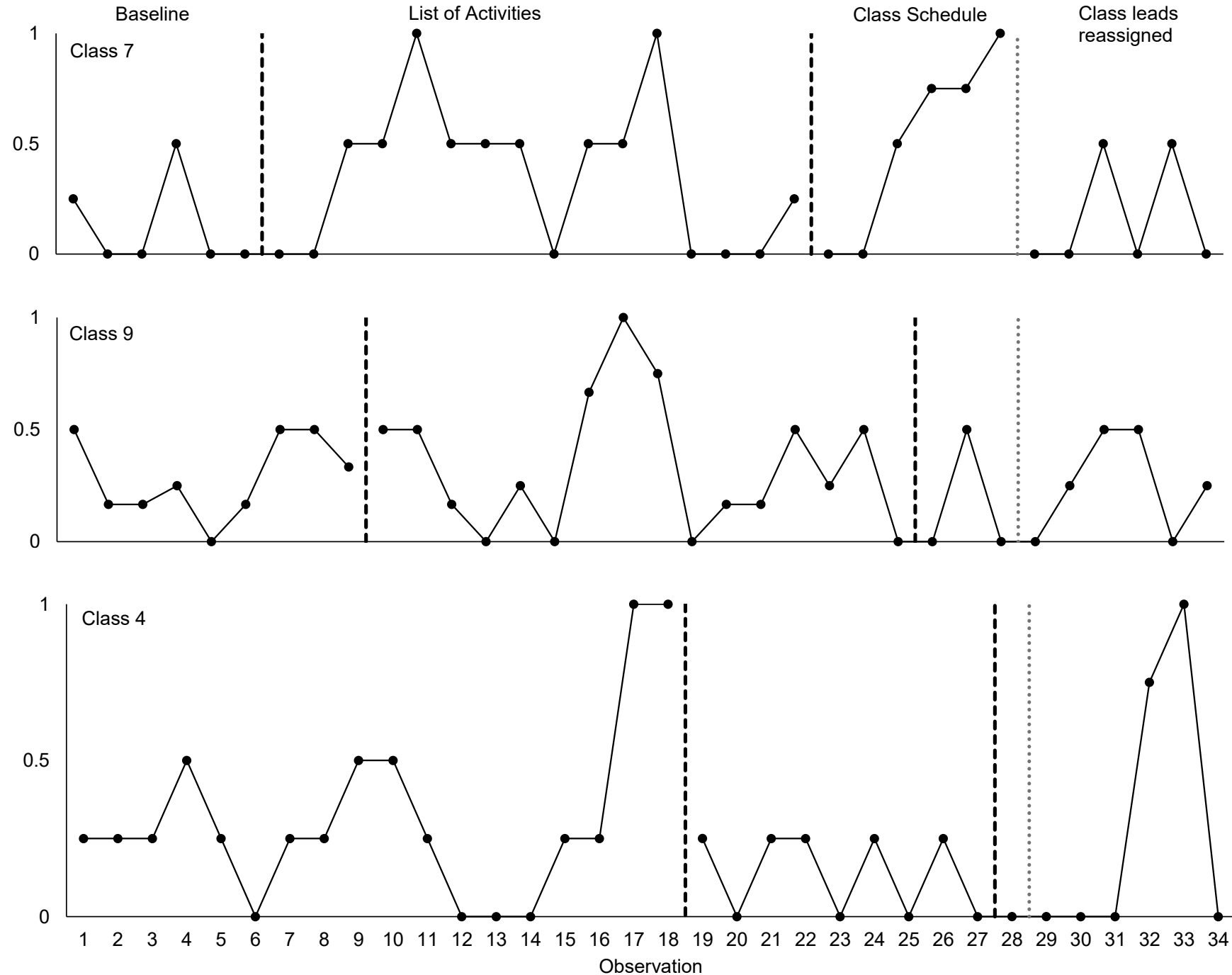
- Class 7: Increase
- Class 9: No difference
- Class 4: Decrease

Class Schedule

- Class 7: Increasing trend
- Class 9: No difference

Reassigned Class Leads

- Class 7: Decrease
- Class 9: No difference
- Class 4: More variability



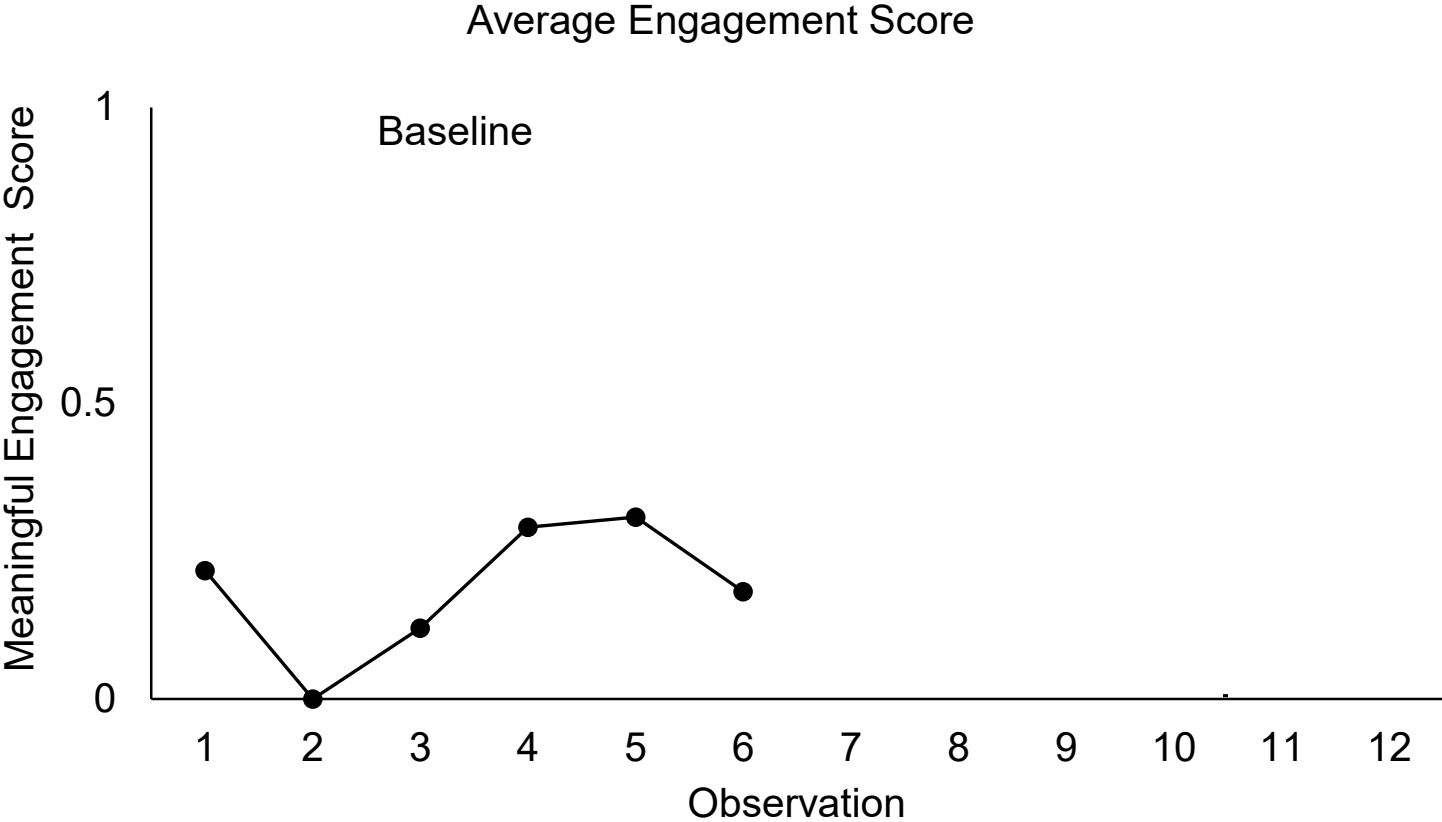
Program-Wide Components

COMPONENT 4: SPOT CHECK AND FEEDBACK

- Service managers receive spot check training
- Service manager spot check system
 - Service managers accompany clinical staff in spot checks
 - Feedback is provided for adherence to expectations for scheduled activities

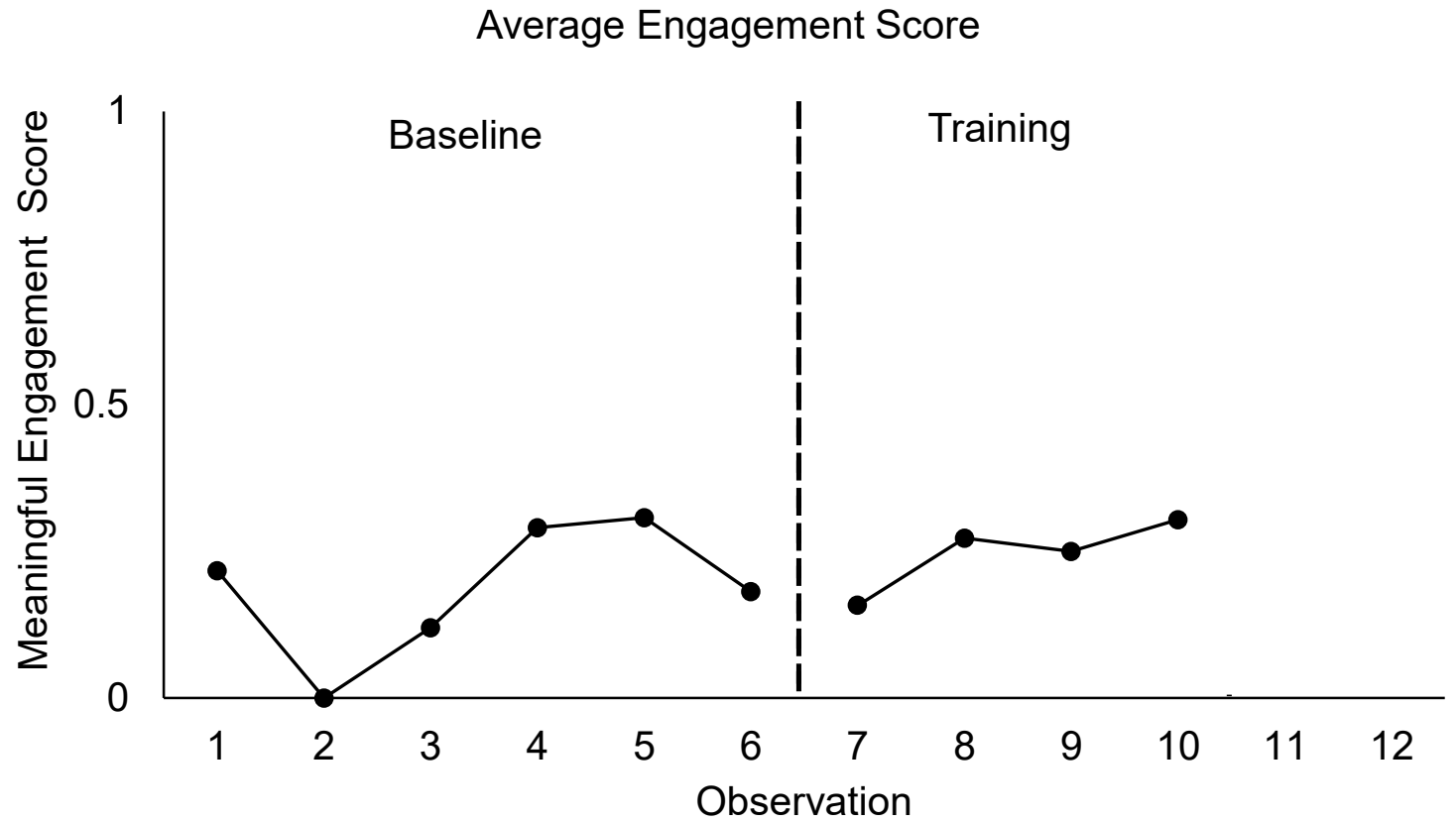
Results

- Baseline
 - Average scores below .5



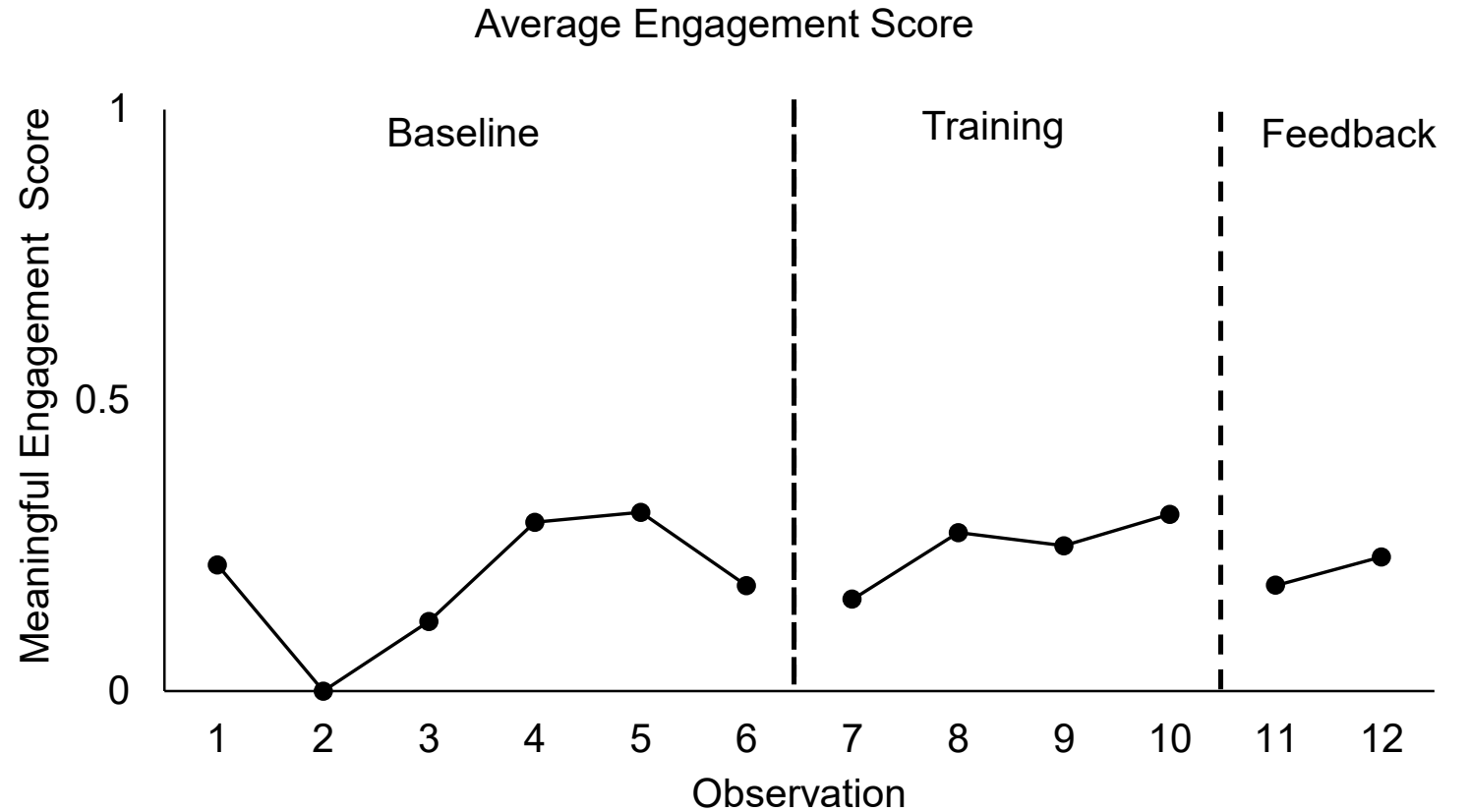
Results

- Baseline
 - Averages scores below .5
- Staff Training
 - No difference



Results

- N = 12
- Baseline
 - Averages scores below .5
- Staff Training
 - No difference
- Feedback
 - No difference



Limitations

Limitations

- Frequency of spot checks
- Timing of spot checks
- Sensitivity of measure
- Rotating classroom staff
- Significant variability at the individual level

Future Directions



- Long term effects of feedback
- More frequent measurement
- Focus on staff engagement (relative to individual engagement)
- Modeling and/or coaching

Takeaways

- Current training components insufficient in producing change in ME
- ME is an important way to improve social validity in a day habilitation setting
 - Including adaptive skills and leisure with choice
- Meaningful engagement looks different across individuals
 - For some it's as simple as a drum
- More work is needed to identify variables that will produce increases in meaningful engagement

Moving Forward

Day-program changes

- Public posting of classroom schedules
- Public display of data
- Brain-storming new group activities in the rooms
 - Starting a weekly yoga class (taught by day-program director)



Moving Forward

Staff/Manager Training

- Weekly meetings with service managers to review data
- Coaching managers on spot checks and giving feedback to staff
- Coaching on receiving staff feedback



Discussion



What are some ways you promote meaningful engagement for your clients?

Strategies for promoting staff engagement with clients?

Thank you!

- **Sarah Weddle**
- Elijah Richardson
- Joe Ricciardi and Jen Zarccone
- Kat Tackitt and Chelsea Thorpe
- And the many more at May Institute that made this project possible!