



Unit 2: Observation of Staff and Analysis

Module 2

Observation and Analysis

OBSERVATION OF STAFF AND ANALYSIS

This module contains two sections:

- Mentor-Coach Forum on Observation and Analysis (1 hour)
- Tutored Video Instruction (TVI) (4 hours)

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By completing this module, Mentor-Coaches will:

- Learn about the five-step professional conferencing process
- Learn the function and purpose of observation
- Learn the strengths and limitations of several types of observation tools
- Be better able to prepare for a pre-observation conference
- Learn to use sections of one formal observation tool for language and literacy
- Deepen awareness of what children should know and be able to do in relation to early writing and alphabet knowledge
- Be better able to assess the quality of a protégé's practices in early writing skills and alphabet knowledge
- Be more aware of the role of objectivity in observation
- Reflect on and strengthen their ability to observe protégés.

I. MENTOR-COACH FORUM ON OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS

CONTEXT

In Unit 2, participants begin their exploration of a five-step Mentor-Coach and protégé Professional Conferencing Process. This facilitated forum begins with a short warm-up exercise that helps participants focus on observation—one of the steps of the process. After this warm-up activity, facilitators will lead participants in two discussions. In the first, the participants will reflect on the self-assessments that they completed in Module 1 of this unit. As a group, they will discuss their knowledge of how children develop early writing and alphabet knowledge and how this process influences their work as a Mentor-Coach. In the second discussion, the participants will revisit the interview on Mentor-Coach systems that they completed as part of Module 4 of Unit 1.

TIME: 1 hour

OVERVIEW

- Introduction to the Module (10 minutes)
- Facilitator-Led Discussion on Perceptual Puzzles (10 minutes)
- Facilitator-Led Discussion on Self-Assessment (20 minutes)
- Facilitator-Led Discussion on Mentor-Coach Systems Interview (15 minutes)
- Break (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Take the following steps to prepare to facilitate this session:

- Review the facilitator's pages for the Mentor-Coach Forum and the accompanying pages in the Mentor-Coach Manual.
- The first discussion you will facilitate is a warm-up activity. Prepare for a brief discussion by using the notes in the Mentor-Coach Manual. Develop approaches or strategies for the discussion that meet the needs of your particular group.
- Prepare to lead the next two facilitator-led discussions by reviewing the self-assessment exercise in Unit 2, Module 1, and the interview exercise in Unit 1, Module 4, where participants used the **Guide for Interviewing Program Leaders About Mentor-Coach Systems**.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MODULE

Welcome the group and give individuals an opportunity to introduce themselves. Use the following notes to help introduce participants to the module.

The topic of this module is how to use Mentor-Coach and protégé conferences to promote the protégé's professional growth and development. *Steps to Success* introduces a five-step Professional Conferencing Process which is grounded in observation and reflection. Just as protégés use observation and reflection to learn more about the children in home-based and center-based settings, Mentor-Coaches use these practices to identify their protégés' strengths and needs by observing them in action. During the TVI, participants will explore the first two steps of this Professional Conferencing Process and learn ways that they can use these steps effectively with their protégés. At the same time, they will also be looking at children's development of early writing and alphabet knowledge.

Before beginning the TVI, we will do a brief, fun activity that sets that stage for the TVI discussion about observation.

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON PERCEPTUAL PUZZLES

Direct participants' attention to the Perceptual Puzzles in their Mentor-Coach Manual. Have them look at the pictures and briefly discuss what they see with a partner. Encourage them to share their thoughts with the large group. Accept a variety of responses. For example, Picture 1 can be seen as an old woman or a young lady. With Picture 2, some participants may see the arrow contained in the Federal Express logo and other may not.

Conclude the discussion by making the following points:

- Each person perceived the same images differently. This is because people pay attention to different visual cues.
- When Mentor-Coaches observe staff and children in classrooms, their perceptions often differ from those of others in the room. As in the Perceptual Puzzles exercise, two Mentor-Coaches may notice entirely different things.

Convey the following information to the participants:

During today's discussion on formal observation, you will explore several ways to observe and record observations of protégés' work. And, you will learn about one formal observation tool. You will practice using observation to help your protégés improve their language and literacy instructional practices. But before we move ahead, think back on what you learned from conducting the self-assessment you just completed and the interview exercise presented in Unit 1, where you used the **Guide for Interviewing Program Leaders About Mentor-Coach Systems**.

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON SELF-ASSESSMENT

In the Unit 2 Self-Assessment, participants assessed their knowledge of practices that support children’s early writing and knowledge of the alphabet. Throughout this group discussion of the self-assessment, help participants to reflect on their knowledge, current practices, and how they can support their protégés.

Encourage participants to share something they learned about themselves. This could be an area of strength, a new goal, or a question. Stress that what they share will be kept in confidence within the group. Use the following questions to guide the discussion of their self-assessments. Invite participants to record their thoughts in their Mentor-Coach Manual.

1. What did you learn about your knowledge of instructional practices that foster children’s early writing skills and learning about the alphabet?
2. Based on this self-assessment, what are some of your strengths?
3. How will these strengths influence your work as a Mentor-Coach?
4. What else do you need to learn about how children learn early writing skills and alphabet knowledge to be able to effectively mentor your protégés’ teaching of these topics?

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON MENTOR-COACH SYSTEMS INTERVIEW**Guidelines for Discussion**

Ask participants to share what they learned from conducting the Mentor-Coach systems interview in Unit 1, Module 4. Use the following questions to guide the discussion:

- 1.** What changes will you make in your Mentor-Coach practices, based on what you learned from the interview?
- 2.** What supports will you have?
- 3.** What changes in the program's overall system did your program manager or director agree to implement or explore?
- 4.** What role, if any, will you have in making the changes?

BREAK

Give participants a chance to check in with you, ask questions, or just stretch their legs before beginning the TVI. Remind participants to be ready to use their program's observation tools in the TVI that follows.

II. TUTORED VIDEO INSTRUCTION (TVI)

CONTEXT

This TVI session introduces Mentor-Coaches to the five-step Professional Conferencing Process. Mentor-Coaches will concentrate on the first two steps: the pre-observation conference and the observation. Mentor-Coaches will learn about the benefits and limitations of different observation methods. They will explore ways to conduct objective and accurate observations.

Using video clips and discussion, Mentor-Coaches will deepen their knowledge about pre-literacy activities for infants and toddlers. Using other videos and a formal observation tool, Mentor-Coaches will focus on the Head Start Child Outcomes for preschoolers' early writing and alphabet knowledge. The content of this session will provide Mentor-Coaches with knowledge and tools to enable them to match their support to the specific strengths and needs of each protégé.

TIME: 4 hours

OVERVIEW

- Introduction to the Professional Conferencing Process (10 minutes)
- Approaches to Observation (45 minutes)
- First Two Steps in the Professional Conferencing Process (40 minutes)
- Observer Bias (20 minutes)
- Supporting Children's Early Writing and Alphabet Knowledge (55 minutes)
- Practice with a Formal Classroom Observation Tool (40 minutes)
- Summary Presentation (5 minutes)
- Facilitator-Led Discussion on Revisiting the Professional Development Plan (20 minutes)
- Wrap-Up (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

Take the following steps to prepare for facilitating this TVI-based session:

- Review the entire Facilitator Guide and the Mentor-Coach Manual (including the related STEP-Docs) for the remainder of this module.
- Preview the TVI tape for this module, being careful to note the transitions from the tape to the facilitator and vice versa.
- Prepare for the facilitator-led discussions by reviewing the questions and discussion points provided.
- Review the ten facilitator-led discussions. Adjust the format, time frames, and approaches to meet the requirements of your group, e.g., for a large group, small groups, triads, or pairs.
- Review Module 3 of Unit 2 for the wrap-up segment of this module.

INTRODUCTION

Introduce the topics and time frames for the TVI using the overview section above. Explain that, as in Unit 1, you will pause the video for exercises and group discussions. Answer any questions about how the Mentor-Coach Manual is used with the TVI.

Facilitator's Transition Statement

Let's now turn to the TVI to continue our discussion about the Professional Conferencing Process.



START THE TVI

TVI CONTENT

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCEING PROCESS

The TVI opens with a presentation about professional conferencing that includes these points:

- The *Steps to Success* curriculum will help Mentor-Coaches learn to use the Professional Conferencing Process as a way to work with teaching staff and home visitors.
- The process is a collaborative one in which both the Mentor-Coach and the protégé play important yet distinct roles.
- The following steps, as depicted in **STEP-Doc 2.2a: Professional Conferencing Process** in the Mentor-Coach Manual, occur in the process:
 - ❑ Pre-Observation Conference
 - ❑ Observation
 - ❑ Post-Observation Analysis
 - ❑ Reflective Conference
 - ❑ Post-Conference Analysis
- The Professional Conferencing Process provides protégés with the opportunity to reflect, ask questions, raise issues, and explore new practices.
- The process enables Mentor-Coaches to stretch protégés' thinking about their teaching or home-visiting practices while validating and supporting their work.

Transition to the Video Clip

Collaboration is a key element in the Professional Conferencing Process. In the video you will see reactions and hear comments from a wide variety of staff.

VIDEO CLIP: The Professional Conferencing Process

In this video, Mentor-Coaches and protégés in preschool, infant, and toddler classrooms from around the country provide examples of each step of the Professional Conferencing Process.

At the conclusion of the video, the presenters make the following points:

- The video only highlights the steps of the process
- We will revisit each step in detail over the course of Units 2 and 3.

TVI CONTENT

APPROACHES TO OBSERVATION

The TVI continues with a presentation that includes the following points:

- Unit 2 will focus on the first three steps in the Professional Conferencing Process—we will explore the first two in the TVI and the third in Module 3. The last two steps will be a focus of Unit 3.
- The TVI presentation will begin with the second step in the process, Observation, because all steps to the process are built around the observation.
- Observation helps protégés to see how their work supports children’s early language and literacy growth and helps Mentor-Coaches collect information about protégés’ strengths and areas of need.
- Observation helps Mentor-Coaches to individualize their work with their protégés.

Transition to the Video Clip

We will see a video clip in which a Dee, Mentor-Coach from Alabama, talks about the importance of observation in her practice.

VIDEO CLIP: Observation Is Essential!

We will now watch a video clip from a Head Start program in Alabama, where Dee talks about the importance of observation in her program’s practice in infant-toddler and preschool classrooms.

Approaches to Observation

The TVI presenters discuss the video clip and then introduce the concept of formal observations with these points:

- There are many different observation methods Mentor-Coaches can use. Each method has distinct benefits and limitations.
- Informal observations consist of casual drop-in visits in which the Mentor-Coach can gather a sense of the overall classroom.
- Formal observations have a more narrow focus: the Mentor-Coach collects information about specific skills or practices.
- During formal observations, Mentor-Coaches remove themselves from being part of the classroom interactions.
- Observers should attempt to make formal observations as accurate and objective as possible.

At the end of the presentation, the TVI presenters will instruct you to pause the TVI for a facilitator-led discussion.

**PAUSE THE TVI**

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON OBSERVATION AND THE PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCING PROCESS

Ask participants to briefly share their experiences with formal observation and professional conferencing by asking the following questions:

1. What are your experiences with observation and professional conferencing, as an observer or as someone observed?
2. How do they compare to those depicted in the two video clips?

Invite participants to record their thoughts in the space provided in their Mentor-Coach Manual.

Facilitator's Transition Statement

In formal observations, observers can use several methods to record what they observe. The following section of the TVI provides information about these methods.



RESUME THE TVI

Observation Recording Methods

The TVI begins a presentation about observation recording methods with the following points:

Observers may choose to use different types of methods to record their observations: open, closed, or combined.

Open Methods: With open methods, the observer writes down everything that is happening in the classroom or an area. This is sometimes called a **narrative observation**. **STEP-Doc 2.2 b: Open Method Example** in the Mentor-Coach Manual provides an example of an open-recording approach.

- Open methods allow an observer to record an entire interaction from the beginning. With such details, protégés can more easily interpret events.
- Open methods allow for the observer to record anything they want, leaving room for preferences and judgments about what to include and leave out.

Closed Methods: With closed methods, the observer uses a tool, such as a checklist, to collect specific information using preset categories. **STEP-Doc 2.2c: Closed Method Example** in the Mentor-Coach Manual provides an example.

- The narrower focus allows the observer to tune out other events and collect information about a specific activity or interaction.
- The drawback to using closed methods is that the observer may miss recording important factors that influence an interaction.

Combined Methods: With combined methods, the observer uses both open and closed recording systems. **STEP-Doc 2.2d: Combined Method Example** in the Mentor-Coach Manual provides an example.

Transition to the Video Clip

Let's watch as two Mentor-Coaches from Denver discuss how they use two different observation methods: a closed method and an open method. Evonne explains how she uses the "Checklist on Quality Conversation" in the observation of her protégé. Cheryl uses an open method to make more-global observations of the classroom and of student-teacher interactions.

VIDEO CLIP: Open and Closed Observation Methods

Two Mentor-Coaches from Denver, Colorado, use different methods of observing their protégés. One protégé asks her Mentor-Coach to observe her conversations with preschool children. The Mentor-Coach uses a closed method to make specific observations. Another Mentor-Coach uses an open method to observe how literacy and language are used in each area of her protégé's preschool classroom. The video clip presents a discussion of the benefits of using both methods of observation, as well as a combined approach, showing examples of observations of both preschool and toddler classrooms.

At the end of the video clip, the TVI presenters will comment on the video and instruct you to pause the TVI for a facilitator-led discussion.

**PAUSE THE TVI**

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON EXAMINING YOUR OWN OBSERVATION TOOLS

Invite participants to examine the staff-observation tools that they brought in from their programs. In pairs, triads, or small groups, they will discuss the strengths and limitations of their tools. They will also discuss how they might envision using the tools as Mentor-Coaches, or how they are currently using the tool with protégés.

Refer participants to “Examining Your Own Observation Tools” on the following page in the Mentor-Coach Manual.

Participants will discuss the tools they use to observe protégés, using the following questions:

- 1.** What type of observation tool(s)—open, closed, combined—do you have?
- 2.** What are the strengths of the tool(s)?
- 3.** What are the limitations?
- 4.** How might you use the tool(s) in your work as a Mentor-Coach? Or, how have you been using the tool(s) with your protégés? How might you use it differently now?

Bring participants back together as a large group. Invite them to share their insights. Highlight the following important points:

- Each method has distinct benefits and limitations.
- Using a combination of methods is often beneficial. For example: Use an open system to assess the whole environment or many aspects of a protégé's practice. Use a chart or paper with lots of space to allow you to write your information. Then, with that information, narrow your focus. Conduct a second observation using a closed method to enable you to record descriptive detail. Use a checklist or an established tool.
- In addition to the open, closed, and combined recording methods, some observers make a videotape to record their observations.
- Many programs develop their own tools, as well as use formal research-based tools.

Ask participants to turn to **STEP-Doc 2.2e: Overview of Formal Classroom-Observation Tools**, contained in the Mentor-Coach Manual. This resource presents a list of some commonly used formal observation tools that examine language and literacy practices:

- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS)
- Infant-Toddler Environment Rating Scale (ITERS)
- Family Day Care Rating Scale (FDCRS)
- Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit (ELLCO).

Briefly review the STEP-Doc with the group. Invite participants to share their experiences with the instruments. Then, ask them to complete the questions in the Mentor-Coach Manual on their own. After 5 minutes, conclude the activity.

Facilitator's Transition Statement

It is important to share an observation tool with your protégé before using it to conduct an observation. The following segment of the TVI discusses ways to share observation tools during the pre-observation conference.



RESUME THE TVI

TVI CONTENT**FIRST TWO STEPS IN THE PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCING PROCESS**

The TVI begins with a presentation on the pre-observation conference.

The pre-observation conference:

- Is the first step in the Professional Conferencing Process
- Sets the stage for a more-focused and productive observation
- Is described in detail in **STEP-Doc 2.2f: Professional Conferencing Guide** that is in the Mentor-Coach Manual.

Transition to the Video Clip

In Denver, Mentor-Coach Mercedes, and her protégé, Julie, are going through the steps of the pre-observation conference. Their focus is on teaching letter recognition.

VIDEO CLIP: The Pre-Observation Conference

Mercedes and Julie have a pre-observation conference to discuss Julie's questions about teaching letter recognition. Mercedes asks Julie what strategies have already been used and about her specific goals for this activity. Mercedes suggests an activity she thinks will fit the protégé's style. Julie implements the activity successfully while Mercedes observes. After the observation, they discuss the activity and why it worked.

Pre-Observation Conference

The presentation continues with points about the video and why the pre-observation conference is important:

- Protégés have the opportunity to voice their needs and goals.
- Mentor-Coaches and protégés can select a focus for the observation, based on the protégés' goals.
- They can also decide together if an observation tool or a videotape will be used to record the observation.
- Mentor-Coaches learn more about the community of learners in the protégés' classrooms.
- Tension about observation is lessened when the protégé knows what the Mentor-Coach is going to observe.
- It allows the mentoring team to build and maintain a trusting relationship.
- It lays the groundwork for a productive post-observation conference.

The **STEP-Doc 2.2g, Pre-Observation Conference Tips**, in the Mentor-Coach Manual, will help guide and focus the pre-observation meeting for Mentor-Coaches.

If videotaping will be part of the observation, there are a number of things to consider. First, the Mentor-Coach must adhere to the program's policies and procedures for videotaping children. The Mentor-Coach must also be sensitive to the fact that videotaping can be a very anxiety-producing event for the protégé. The Mentor-Coach can use the pre-observation conference to assure the protégé that:

- Videotaping is being used as a technique for documentation, not evaluation
- He or she will have an opportunity to view the videotape privately before the post-observation conference
- He or she must give explicit permission in the event that the Mentor-Coach asks to share the videotape with others. If the Mentor-Coach expects to use videotapes frequently with the protégé, he or she may wish to add agreements about videotaping to their mentor-coaching contract (described in Unit 1, Module 3).

Following these pre-conference points, the TVI presenter will instruct you to pause the TVI for a facilitator-led discussion.



PAUSE THE TVI

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON COMING TO AGREEMENT

A Case Study

Direct participants to read **Coming to Agreement: A Case Study**, about a Mentor-Coach (Parisa) and her protégé (Nina). Using these questions, ask them to discuss, in pairs or small groups, the implications that a pre-observation conference and the use of formal observation tools could have on such a situation.

1. What could Parisa do differently to ease her own and Nina's anxiety?
2. How could a pre-observation conference support Parisa's work?
3. How can a formal observation tool like the ELLCO support Parisa's work as a Mentor-Coach?
4. What about this scenario sounds familiar to you?

Bring the group back together to share discussion highlights.

Make the following points if they do not emerge during the discussion:

- A pre-observation conference would help Nina understand the purpose of the observation and how Parisa was planning to use the information.
- During the pre-observation conference Parisa could reassure Nina that the scores from the ELLCO were not going to be used in an evaluative or punitive way. This reassurance might have eased Nina's anxiety about the observation.
- Parisa should incorporate Nina's goals into the observation. She could use one part of the ELLCO to focus on a goal that Nina has set for herself. Setting goals before conducting an observation will help to focus the actual observation and narrow the scope of the Mentor-Coach's work.

- Maintaining the agreed-on focus during the observation is sometimes challenging, particularly if the protégé has many needs.
- Formal observation tools do help keep an observation more objective and allow the Mentor-Coach to gather focused, reliable information.

Facilitator's Transition Statement

Through pre-observation conferencing, Mentor-Coaches have many opportunities to strengthen their relationship with their protégés. During this next TVI section, you will learn more about conducting an observation. You will also learn how to build and sustain your partnership by thinking about how you, as a Mentor-Coach, can conduct a more objective observation by being aware of your conscious and unconscious preconceptions about your protégé.

**RESUME THE TVI**

Conducting the Observation

The TVI presentation continues with the following points about conducting the observation:

- Before the observation, the Mentor-Coach checks in with the protégé to determine if there have been any changes to the observation plan—the agreements made between the Mentor-Coach and the protégé during the pre-observation conference.
- During the observation, the Mentor-Coach:
 - ❑ Focuses on the area agreed on during the pre-observation conference
 - ❑ Maintains an open and friendly manner in the classroom or home
 - ❑ Tells children who ask that he or she is there “to watch them play”
 - ❑ Focuses on the protégé’s practice and his or her interactions with children, not on the children
 - ❑ Strives to record observations according to the agreed-on plan
 - ❑ Documents patterns of protégé behavior or critical incidents that give clues about the protégé’s understanding of children’s learning
 - ❑ Keeps the written documentation objective by recording exactly what he or she sees and hears. **STEP-Doc 2.2h: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording** in the Mentor-Coach Manual provides ideas to help Mentor-Coaches as they record their observations.

Transition to the Video Clip

In a toddler classroom in Boston we will see Valerie, a Mentor-Coach, using an observation tool and talking about her experience.

VIDEO CLIP: Conducting an Observation

The video clip depicts Valerie conducting an observation with a tool in a toddler classroom. After the observation she talks about what she does to make the experience effective.

Following the clip, the TVI presenters will briefly discuss the video and instruct you to pause the TVI for a facilitator-led discussion.

**PAUSE THE TVI**

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON CONDUCTING AN OBSERVATION

Begin a discussion about conducting an observation using these questions:

1. Putting the protégé and the children at ease during the observation is a common challenge. So is maintaining the focus agreed-on during the pre-observation conference. What do you do to manage these challenges during your observations?
2. What new techniques or strategies will you try during your next observation of your protégé?

Invite participants to record their responses in the Mentor-Coach Manual.

Facilitator's Transition Statement

Another common observer challenge is maintaining objectivity during the observation. The next segment of the TVI addresses the issue of observer bias and steps that Mentor-Coaches can take to minimize the effect of bias during their observations.



RESUME THE TVI

TVI CONTENT

OBSERVER BIAS

The presentation continues with the following points about observer bias:

- Trust is a key ingredient in mentor-coaching.
- Mentor-Coaches need to build strong, trusting, and honest relationships with their protégés. To do so, they must be aware of their own personal and cultural values.
- Mentor-Coaches must understand that culture and values influence the staff's practice and may differ from their own culture-based values.
- In Unit 1, we discussed a general definition of bias; we will now discuss a specific type of bias: observer bias.
- Everyone looks at events through different lenses shaped by their culture and experiences.
- These experiential lenses can influence and guide what Mentor-Coaches pay attention to during an observation.
- Observer bias is a way of thinking that prevents someone from seeing a situation or a person objectively.
- Biases are often subtle and lie below the surface and grow from an observer's previous experiences.
- Biases can include the "halo," "horns," or "middle of the road effects."
- Biases can prevent Mentor-Coaches from being objective and effective observers.

To minimize the effects of observer biases, Mentor-Coaches can:

- Become aware of the different lenses that they bring to a situation and the impact that those lenses have on their observation.
- Talk about beliefs and values with protégés.
- Consider using formal observation tools like the ITERS and the ELLCO, which provide objective criteria to help minimize bias.
- Follow guidelines for objective and accurate recording.

Following these points, the TVI presenters will instruct you to pause the TVI for a facilitator-led discussion.



PAUSE THE TVI

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON OBSERVER BIAS

Read one of the scenarios from the **Observer Bias Scenarios** in the Mentor-Coach Manual out loud. Invite discussion by asking the following questions (on the previous page in the Mentor-Coach Manual):

1. What about this scenario seems familiar? Do you see bias in the Mentor-Coach's behavior?
2. What steps could the Mentor-Coach take to minimize or overcome the effects of bias in her observations?

Engage participants in a discussion about their own experiences with observer bias. You may need to share some of your own experiences to start the conversation:

3. What are some biases that have surfaced when you were observing protégés?
4. How did you minimize the effects of bias on your observations?

Invite participants to record their thoughts and ideas in the Mentor-Coach Manual.

Facilitator's Transition Statement

Mentor-Coaches must also have solid content knowledge about effective instructional practices for teaching language and literacy skills to ensure that their observations can be objective and accurate. During this next TVI section, you will explore important concepts about the kinds of classroom or home environments that encourage children's development of early writing and literacy skills.



RESUME THE TVI

TVI CONTENT

SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S EARLY WRITING AND ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

This segment of the TVI begins with these points:

- Protégés play a major role in stimulating children's early literacy development.
- In this portion of the training, Mentor-Coaches will examine many strategies that their protégés can and should use to support children's early attempts at writing and that help children to learn about letters of the alphabet.
- Mentor-Coaches need solid knowledge about early literacy in order to effectively observe and assess their protégé's practices in these two content areas.

Preparing the Youngest Children for Writing

The TVI continues with these points:

- Children develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes about literacy even before they can read and write in adult ways.
- In infancy, children are developing important fine motor skills that affect their later attempts at writing. Protégés and parents can foster this development by providing a wide variety of age-appropriate materials for infants to explore and manipulate.
- Toddlers continue to build and refine their fine-motor skills. Between 18 and 24 months of age, they are able to grasp and use writing tools to make marks. Protégés and parents can support toddlers' early writing attempts by providing them with opportunities to:
 - Build the eye-hand coordination needed for writing, through fine motor activities such as pouring and dumping at the sand table, stacking blocks, and manipulating clay and play dough
 - Explore a variety of writing materials, including paints, markers, and large crayons
 - Scribble and draw at an easel, on a white board, and on paper.

- Protégés and parents can also help very young children develop positive attitudes about writing by:
 - Modeling writing for various purposes, including making lists, writing letters, labeling the toddler's work
 - Narrating what they write for children.

Transition to the Video Clip

We will now visit Early Head Start programs to look at some early writing activities with infant and toddlers.

VIDEO CLIP: Early Writing

This video clip shows infants and toddlers engaged in fine-motor activities. It also shows a variety of toddlers' early attempts at writing. The Mentor-Coaches discuss ways to support young children's early writing skills.

The TVI will now focus on strategies that protégés can use with older children to support them in early writing activities.

Early Writing in the Preschool Years

Like toddlers, preschoolers need opportunities to experiment with writing.

The Head Start Child Outcomes Framework contains important indicators of preschoolers' writing development. At this age, children:

- Develop understanding that writing is a way of communicating for a purpose
- Begin to represent their experiences through pictures and dictation
- Progress from using scribbles to more-conventional forms of writing.

As they do with toddlers, parents and protégés can provide preschoolers with opportunities to:

- Explore writing materials through scribbling, drawing, and writing
- Build the eye-hand coordination needed for writing by participating in various fine motor activities including putting together puzzles, building with blocks, and cutting with scissors.

To achieve positive outcomes, preschool children also need:

- Access to a wide variety of writing materials around the classroom
- Plenty of time throughout the day to engage in writing and drawing
- Opportunities to practice writing for a purpose, e.g., writing their names on a sign-in sheet, labeling a block creation, sending a letter to another child or a relative, creating a grocery list in the dramatic play area.

Protégés can support children’s writing attempts by:

- Creating inviting writing centers in the classroom that contain a variety of materials for children’s use
- Putting writing tools in other areas of the classroom, e.g., the dramatic play and block areas
- Planning activities that encourage writing, such as creating journals
- Talking to children about their work. By asking questions that focus individual children on their attempted or pretend writing, protégés can introduce such writing concepts as starting at the top of the page.
- Taking dictation of children’s words and stories. While writing, protégés can talk about how the letters are formed.
- Modeling writing for various purposes: making lists, writing letters or notes to send home, and creating signs and labels for the classroom.

Transition to the Video Clip

We will visit Sarah in her Ohio preschool class where children enjoy a variety of writing experiences.

VIDEO CLIP: Preschool Writing

Sarah, a protégé in Ohio, supports two preschool children in a variety of meaningful writing experiences and expands upon their current skills and abilities. She explains her goals and strategies for working with these children.

Following the video clip, the TVI presenters will comment on the video and direct you to pause the TVI to conduct a facilitator-led discussion about both writing clips.



PAUSE THE TVI

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S WRITING

Give the participants the opportunity to reflect on the practices of protégés (in either infant and toddler or preschool classrooms) that they are currently mentoring or those they may have mentored in the past. Pose these questions:

1. What are your protégé's strengths in promoting children's writing development?
2. In what areas do they need the most support?
3. What are some effective strategies that you use to provide this support to your protégés?

Invite participants to record their thoughts and ideas in the Mentor-Coach Manual.

Facilitator's Transition Statement

Children's experiences with early writing are clearly tied to their acquisition of alphabet knowledge. The TVI will now focus on this important domain of early literacy development.



RESUME THE TVI

Alphabet Knowledge

The TVI continues with these points about toddlers:

- Children begin to acquire alphabet knowledge during their toddler years.
- Exposure to the alphabet through songs, books, puzzles, and environmental print is appropriate for toddlers as well as preschoolers.
- Protégés and parents can begin to introduce toddlers to the letters in their names, but learning to recognize and identify all of the letters is not an appropriate goal for this age group.

The Alphabet Knowledge domain element of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework includes these indicators for preschoolers:

- Associating the names of letters with their shapes and sounds
- Increasing ability to notice beginning letters in familiar words
- Identification of 10 letters of the alphabet (legislatively mandated)
- Knowledge that letters are a special category of visual graphics that can be individually named (legislatively mandated).

Alphabet learning is an appropriate goal for preschoolers when it occurs within a meaningful and authentic context. But children need to learn more than the names of some letters. They need to learn how letters function in written language. Knowing the names of letters helps children begin to understand the letter-sound correspondences. Protégés and parents can help preschool children learn about the alphabet by:

- Giving children explicit instruction in the context of a meaningful interaction.
- Beginning with teaching the letters in the child's name.
- Avoiding isolated, meaningless activities like copying letters on worksheets or using stencils and dot-to-dot activities.
- Focusing on upper case letters first, which are easier for children to identify and form; as they gain competence, introduce lower case letters.
- Having fun with letters without turning activities into drills.
- Modeling the writing of letters, naming letters as they write them for children, and talking about how the letters are formed.

Using the Classroom Environment to Support Alphabet Learning

The TVI continues with these points:

In center-based programs, protégés can use the classroom environment to support alphabet learning by:

- Displaying children’s names and simple print in areas toddlers use
- Hanging the alphabet at children’s eye level
- Displaying schedules, attendance charts, signs, and rules in preschool rooms
- Displaying around the room names and labels that expose children to conventional print—initial letter in upper case followed by lower case letters
- Providing children with access to puzzles, alphabet blocks, magnetic letters, and letter stamps showing both upper and lower case letters.
- Supplying the preschool writing center with word rings, name cards, and alphabet strips
- Furnishing the book or library area with a variety of alphabet books.

Transition to the Video Clip

We will visit a New London, Connecticut, preschool classroom where a protégé uses play situations to reinforce acquisition of alphabet knowledge. Then, we will visit a California classroom to see how children’s playing with letter shapes develops their ability to recognize letters.

VIDEO CLIP: Alphabet Knowledge

This video shows Kim in a New London, Connecticut, preschool classroom helping children to learn about the alphabet through play. She focuses on the letters in the children's names, using a game with a parachute and other activities. The Mentor-Coach talks about the protégé's approach. The video also shows how Tamera in California uses an activity with play dough and alphabet shapes to expose toddlers to the alphabet.

The TVI presenters will summarize the video clip and transition participants to the facilitator-led discussion.

**PAUSE THE TVI**

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

Begin a discussion about the participants' own experiences in supporting protégés' efforts to teach children about the alphabet. Pose these questions:

1. What common misunderstandings about alphabet knowledge have you seen in your work with protégés?
2. What are some strategies you have used to address these misunderstandings?

Invite participants to record their thoughts and ideas in their Mentor-Coach Manual.

Facilitator's Transition Statement

So far in the TVI, you have been introduced to the Professional Conferencing Process and have focused on an important step—observation. You learned about various methods and tools used for formal observation. You also had an opportunity to refresh your knowledge of two aspects of early literacy development: early writing and alphabet knowledge. In this next part of the TVI, you will have a chance to apply what you have learned. You will practice your observation skills using a formal tool.



START THE TVI

TVI CONTENT

PRACTICE WITH A FORMAL CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOL

This segment of the TVI opens with the following information.

In this final segment of the TVI, participants will have the opportunity to apply what they have learned about the formal classroom observation of early literacy practices. They will practice their observation skills by viewing videotaped footage of two classrooms and recording their observations using a formal tool.

Although the practice session uses only one particular tool, the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit (ELLCO), the process can be applied to any number of classroom or protégé observation instruments.

The ELLCO tool was selected for this activity because it focuses on the environment in which children develop literacy skills and on what protégés do to support children's ability to learn them. Mentor-Coaches will practice using two sections of the ELLCO Classroom Observation, Item 10P: Approaches to Writing and Item 2: Contents of the Classroom.

ELLCO Scoring

The presenters will display the ELLCO tool and provide instruction about scoring using these points:

- Scoring of the Classroom Observation component is based on a 5-point rating scale.
- There are three anchor ratings or scores: 5 = Exemplary, 3 = Basic, and 1 = Deficient.
- Each anchor is supported by statements or descriptions of classroom qualities and characteristics.
- The scorer must consider the strength of the evidence observed in the classroom.

Following this introduction, the TVI presenter provides a transition to the facilitator-led discussion.



PAUSE THE TVI

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON OBSERVATION OF A PRESCHOOL CLASSROOM

During this activity and discussion, participants practice using portions of the ELLCO. They will use the section on Approaches to Children’s Writing, giving them a chance to apply what they have learned about observation and analysis of classroom practices. They will have a second chance to practice using another section of the ELLCO called Contents of the Classroom.

Participants will watch video clips of classroom practice, score ELLCO items, and then discuss answers as a group. After each scenario discussion, play the TVI tape and listen to the discussion about the reasoning behind the appropriate score.

Practice Session 1: Approaches to Children’s Writing

- Tell participants they will watch a video clip of two children writing stories during class time. They will score Item 10P: Approaches to Children’s Writing, from the ELLCO.
- Instruct them to first read **Observation of a Preschool Classroom: Approaches to Children’s Writing** in their Mentor-Coach Manual and then review their notes (on their own) from the TVI content about ways to support early writing.
- Remind them to pay close attention to how the teacher in the video is supporting children’s writing. Encourage them to take notes during the video, recording the evidence related only to Item 10P.



START THE TVI

VIDEO CLIP: ELLCO Video—Ana’s Story

This video of a Boston preschooler’s early writing experience provides an opportunity to practice using an observation tool.

Stop the TVI at the conclusion of the **Ana’s Story** clip.

**PAUSE THE TVI**

Tell participants to score Item 10P using the ELLCO section provided in the Mentor-Coach Manual.

When they have finished, lead a discussion about their scores and why they selected a particular rating, using the following questions:

1. What score did you assign?
2. Why did you assign this score?
3. What evidence supports your decision?

Allow for disagreement during the discussion, knowing that you will be hearing the ELLCO experts’ ratings in the next TVI section.

Facilitator’s Transition Statement

We will now have an opportunity to hear how ELLCO experts have scored this interaction.

**START THE TVI**

The TVI presenters note that ELLCO experts have scored this interaction as a 3 (“Basic”), because:

- The teacher provides appropriate writing instruction
- The teacher is available to support writing, including taking dictation
- The writing area is not distinct from the art area.

The TVI presenters will instruct you to pause the video to help participants prepare to score another video clip.



PAUSE THE TVI

Allow time for participants to react to the expert’s score and compare it to their own. If you choose, use the following question to further the discussion:

How else could the teacher have supported writing, in this video scenario?

Allow for disagreement during the discussions, steering participant’s understanding towards the rating provided by the ELLCO experts.

After the discussion, transition to the next practice session.

Practice Session 2: Contents of the Classroom

- Tell participants that they will view a video clip of preschool children in a dramatic play area that is set up like an airport. They will score Item 2: Contents of the Classroom, from the ELLCO.
- Instruct them to first read **Observation of a Preschool Classroom: Contents of the Classroom** in their Mentor-Coach Manual.
- Remind them to pay close attention to the organization and content of the dramatic-play area and how the children’s learning is supported. Encourage them to take notes during the video, recording the evidence related only to Item 2.

**START THE TVI****Video Clip: ELLCO Video—Airport**

This video of a small group of Boston preschool children in a dramatic-play area provides an opportunity to practice using an observation tool.

Stop the TVI when the Airport scene concludes.

**PAUSE THE TVI**

Tell participants to score Item 2. Lead a discussion about their scores using the following questions:

1. What score did you assign?
2. Why did you assign this score?
3. What evidence supports your decision?

Allow for disagreement during the discussion, knowing that you will be hearing the ELLCO experts’ ratings in the next TVI section.

Conclude the discussion by telling participants that they will now have an opportunity to hear how ELLCO experts have scored this video clip.

**START THE TVI**

The TVI presenters note that ELLCO experts score this as a 5 (“Exemplary”), because classroom materials:

- Are organized in conceptually related groups that are appealing and accessible to children
- Suggest particular purposes to children.

**PAUSE THE TVI**

Allow time for participants to react to the expert’s score and compare it to their own. Allow for disagreement during the discussions, steering their understanding towards the rating provided by the ELLCO experts.

Facilitator’s Transition Statement

This completes the practice activity. The TVI will now conclude with a summary of what you have learned in this module.

**START THE TVI**

Summary Presentation

The presenters conclude the TVI with the following points:

- During this TVI session, the first two steps in the Professional Conferencing Process were discussed—the pre-observation conference and the observation.
- This process will help Mentor-Coaches collaborate with protégés as they reflect, ask questions, raise issues, and explore new ways of doing things.
- Observation is key to the Professional Conferencing Process. By observing staff members, Mentor-Coaches can identify the strengths and needs of protégés.
- Each observation helps Mentor-Coaches to identify ways to improve their protégés' language and literacy practices.
- Observation is one of the most important ways that Mentor-Coaches can tailor their support to the individual needs of each protégé.
- Mentor-Coaches can use the pre-observation conference to prepare themselves and their protégé for the observation.
- Formal observation tools, such as the ELLCO, can guide observations, helping Mentor-Coaches use objective criteria instead of their own values and opinions to assess classroom quality.
- Mentor-Coaches should consistently be aware of and address potential bias, understanding the lenses they bring to each observation.
- Mentor-Coaches require specific skills and knowledge to use observation tools. They should understand how children develop and how protégés learn. They also need an excellent understanding of the Head Start Child Outcomes Framework for language and literacy.
- In this module, we focused on supporting children's development of early writing and alphabet knowledge.

The TVI presenters close the presentation by instructing you to stop the video for the final facilitator-led discussion.



STOP THE TVI

FACILITATOR-LED DISCUSSION ON THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Give participants time to reflect on what they learned from this module. Refer them to the questions in the Mentor-Coach Manual to guide their reflection:

1. How does what you learned about professional conferencing and observation compare to your current practice as a Mentor-Coach? What elements are you currently using? What will you change?
2. What do you consider your biggest challenge in conducting an observation?
3. How might you address your challenge?

Ask them to review their Professional Development Plan to check on their progress, make any necessary changes, and decide on next steps.

Take time for any discussion and comments about the Professional Development Plan.

WRAP-UP

Ask participants to share their final thoughts or questions on Module 2. Refer them to the Reference List at the end of Unit 2 for additional resources.

Tell the participants that before adopting a formal observation tool like the ELLCO, they should be trained in how to use the tool. Advise them to contact the publisher of the tool they are interested in using to get information on training opportunities. Remind them that **STEP-Doc 2.2e** gives the publishers' contact information.

Conclude the session by:

- Reviewing Module 3 of Unit 2 with the group.
- Scheduling a time to meet for the next facilitated session (Unit 2, Module 3).

