

MODULE 2

OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS

Two heads, four eyes.

—a saying of the Igbo People of Nigeria

This module contains two sections:

- Mentor-Coach Forum on Observation and Analysis
- Tutored Video Instruction (TVI).

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By completing this module, you 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 and alphabet knowledge
- Be more aware of the role of objectivity in observation
- Reflect on and strengthen your ability to observe protégés.

I. MENTOR-COACH FORUM ON OBSERVATION AND ANALYSIS

CONTEXT

In Unit 2, you will begin your exploration of the five-step Mentor-Coach and protégé Professional Conferencing Process. This forum begins with a short warm-up exercise to help you focus on observation—one of the steps of the process. After this warm-up exercise, you will participate in two discussions. In the first, you and your fellow participants will reflect on the self-assessments that you completed in Module 1 of this unit. As a group, you will discuss your knowledge of children’s early writing and alphabet knowledge and how it influences your work as Mentor-Coaches. In the second discussion, you will revisit the interview on Mentor-Coach systems that you completed as part of Module 4 of Unit 1.



INTRODUCTION TO THE MODULE

Observation is a mirror that Mentor-Coaches can hold up to help protégés view their own work in classrooms or with families. Through this mirror protégés can see how their work supports children's learning and improves children's outcomes. It can also help Mentor-Coaches collect accurate, reliable information about a protégé's strengths, as well as about areas that can be enhanced. With this information, Mentor-Coaches can help protégés to think honestly about their work, and validate and reinforce effective practice. Mentor-Coaches also can help protégés set goals for professional growth. Observation is one of the most important ways that Mentor-Coaches can tailor their support to the individual needs of each protégé.

As you know from completing Module 1, today's *Steps to Success* focus is on preparing for and conducting observations. These are the first two steps of a professional conferencing process that will be explored in Units 2 and 3. During today's TVI, you will learn how to plan for an observation and examine several types of observation methods. Throughout this module, you will practice using observation to help your protégés improve their language and literacy practices, especially those related to children's early efforts to write and learn about the alphabet. You will also practice with one formal observation tool.

Before moving ahead, you will be thinking back to what you learned from conducting the interview on Mentor-Coach systems in Unit 1. You will also discuss the self-assessment you just completed.

PERCEPTUAL PUZZLES

Look at the pictures below and discuss them with your partner.

Picture 1: Can you point out a young woman? An old woman?

Picture 1:



Picture 2: Can you find an arrow in this common logo?

Picture 2:



SELF-ASSESSMENT

In Module 1, you had the chance to assess your knowledge of children’s early writing and alphabet knowledge. As you reflect back on the self-assessment, think about something that you learned about yourself—an area of strength, a new goal, or a question. Use the following questions to guide your thinking.

- 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 gain alphabet knowledge to be able to effectively mentor your protégés around these teaching these topics?

MENTOR-COACH SYSTEMS INTERVIEW

In Modules 3 and 4 of Unit 1, you had the chance to think about your program's current mentor-coaching system. You considered the overlapping roles and responsibilities of the Mentor-Coach and the supervisor. In an interview activity with your program manager or director, you discussed the program's expectations for the Mentor-Coach. You explored how to better mesh Mentor-Coach activities with the program's operations.

Think about what you learned from conducting the interview on Mentor-Coach systems.

- 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

II. TUTORED VIDEO INSTRUCTION (TVI)

CONTEXT

This TVI session introduces you to the five-step Professional Conferencing Process. This process helps you work with teaching staff and home visitors. In this module you will concentrate on the first two steps of the conferencing process—the pre-observation conference and the observation. You will learn about the benefits and limitations of different observation methods. You will also explore ways to meet the challenge of conducting objective and accurate observations.

Using video clips and discussion, you will reflect on and deepen your knowledge about preparing the youngest children for writing. Using other videos and a formal observation tool, you will focus on the Head Start Child Outcomes for preschoolers' early writing and alphabet knowledge. The content of this session will provide you with the knowledge and tools to enable you to match your support to the specific strengths and needs of each protégé.



INTRODUCTION TO THE PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCING PROCESS

As Mentor-Coaches, we help the teachers actually develop their skills . . . We observe the classroom. We, of course, look for the strengths within a teacher, and we help them see the areas where others provide good examples. Then we let them develop, reflecting on what they would like to do to become better teachers and develop[ing] their own ideas and plans [about] becoming more professional and actually helping children.

—*Mentor-Coach*

Through the *Steps to Success* curriculum, you will learn how to use the Professional Conferencing Process in your work with your protégé. The process, which is depicted in **STEP-Doc 2.2a: The Professional Conferencing Process**, contains five steps:

1. Pre-Observation Conference
2. Observation
3. Post-Observation Analysis
4. Reflective Conference
5. Post-Conference Analysis

This unit will focus on the first three steps in this process—Steps 1 and 2 in this module, Step 3 in Module 3. Unit 3 will focus on the last two steps.

The Mentor-Coach and protégé need to establish a trusting relationship before initiating the Professional Conferencing Process. Unit 1 contained many ideas for building and sustaining trust with your protégé.

Professional Conferencing is a collaborative process.

What Mentor-Coaches Can Do:

- Initiate and manage the process.
- Guard against being too directive.
- Look for opportunities to stretch protégés' thinking.

What Protégés Can Do:

- Reflect on and talk about their work.
- Ask questions, raise issues.
- Explore new ways of doing things.

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.

APPROACHES TO OBSERVATION**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

Observation is the heart of the Professional Conferencing Process. It provides Mentor-Coaches and protégés with information and topics to talk about and reflect on. Observation helps protégés to see how their work supports the growth of children’s early language and literacy skills, and helps Mentor-Coaches collect information about protégés’ strengths and areas of need.

Therefore, learning how to observe protégés in their practice is an important skill for Mentor-Coaches to develop. You will learn more about conducting an observation throughout this module.

Each observational approach has benefits and limitations:

Formal observations have a narrow focus. They collect information about specific skills and practices.

Drop-in visits are not formal observations. Mentor-Coaches often use this informal approach to gain a sense of the overall classroom.

During formal observations, Mentor-Coaches remove themselves from being a part of the classroom interactions.

Formal observations should be accurate and objective. There are different systems for recording observations.

OBSERVATION AND THE PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCING PROCESS

1. What are your experiences with formal observation and professional conferencing, either as an observer or as someone observed?

2. How do they compare with those depicted in the two video clips?



Observation Recording Methods

Formal observations use different types of recording.

In **open methods**, also called narrative descriptions, the observer writes down everything that is happening in the classroom or an area, such as recording what is happening at lunchtime.

In **closed methods**, the observer has a specific focus and limits the kind of information collected. This method is designed to collect a specific type of information using preset categories. They are often items on a checklist or chart that are marked off or tallied.

Combined methods use features of both open and closed systems. Information on some commonly used formal classroom observation tools that help observers to examine language and literacy practices are presented at the end of this document.

Open Methods:

- Benefits: allows recording an entire event from beginning to end; allows for context-setting
- Limitations: Individuals influence what to include and leave out (lack of objectivity).
- See **STEP-Doc 2.2b: Open Method Example.**

Closed Methods:

- Benefits: Observer can tune out other events and collect information about a specific activity or interaction; be more objective.
- Limitations: Observer may miss recording important factors that influence an interaction.
- See **STEP-Doc 2.2c: Closed Method Example.**

Combined Methods:

- Use the best features of open and closed systems.
- See **STEP-Doc 2.2d: Combined Method Example.**

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.

EXAMINING YOUR OWN OBSERVATION TOOLS

On your own or with a partner(s) respond to the following questions about the observation tool(s) that you use to observe protégés.

- 1.** What type of observation tool(s)—open, closed, or 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? Or, how might you use it (them) differently now?

Overview of Formal Observation Tools

STEP-Doc 2.2e: Overview of Classroom Observation Tools presents information on some commonly used observation tools that examine language and literacy practices.

Based on your conversations in this exercise and on your review of **STEP-Doc 2.2e**, consider the following questions:

- 1. What observation tools would you like to know more about?

- 2. What new tools, if any, would you like to try with your protégé?

- 3. What information about observation tools would you like to share with other education leaders in your program?

FIRST TWO STEPS IN THE PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCING PROCESS

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

During pre-observation conferences, participants have an opportunity to establish positive working relationships with each other, laying the groundwork for the development of mutual trust.

—J. Caruso and T. Fawcett (1999)

During a pre-observation conference, the Mentor-Coach explains the function and the purpose of the observation to the protégé. This is the first step in the Professional Conferencing Process. If this is the first time a protégé has ever been observed, the Mentor-Coach explains that the observation is a tool that is used to support a protégé as she or he develops instructional practices for language and literacy. The Mentor-Coach also emphasizes that she will not use the observation to evaluate the protégé. See **STEP-Doc 2.2f: Professional Conferencing Guide** for additional information.

What Mentor-Coaches Can Do:

- Learn more about the make-up, values, and culture of the community of learners in the protégé’s classroom.
- Ease tension and anxiety about observation.
- Lay the groundwork for a productive post-observation conference.

What Protégés Can Do:

- Identify needs and goals.
- Gain clarity about the observation.

Mentor-Coaches and Protégés Together Can:

- Select a focus for the observation.
- Agree on an approach, a recording method (observation tool or videotape), and a time.
- Set time for the post-observation conference.
- Build a trusting relationship.

COMING TO AGREEMENT

A Case Study

Parisa is one of several Mentor-Coaches at a center-based Head Start program. Just recently her program hired a consultant to train all the Mentor-Coaches in using the Early Language and Literacy Classroom Observation Toolkit (ELLCO). The program director has asked every Mentor-Coach to conduct an ELLCO in each one of their protégé's classrooms.

Parisa decides to use the ELLCO in Nina's classroom first, since she has spent a lot of time there. She feels like she knows Nina well and that they have a trusting Mentor-Coach and protégé relationship. Parisa explains to Nina that she will spend two hours in her classroom to conduct an ELLCO, which will focus on Nina's language and literacy practices. Parisa also gives Nina a copy of the ELLCO prior to the visit.

Despite Parisa's efforts to give her information about the ELLCO, Nina is still very nervous about the upcoming observation. The ELLCO seems more like a test than a way to support her work with children. She tells Parisa, "The numbers make me nervous. I feel like I am back in school being tested and evaluated."

Parisa feels conflicted about spending so much time in one teacher's classroom, especially one she already knows so well. She thinks to herself, "I already know Nina and her classroom well. What more can I learn? This will be a waste of my time." Parisa also worries that the use of a formal tool will make Nina uncomfortable and strain their relationship.

Discussion Questions

1. What could Parisa do differently in this scenario to ease her own and Nina's anxiety about the observation?

2. How could the pre-observation conference support Parisa's work in this situation?

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 in your work as a Mentor-Coach?

Conducting the Observation

Upon arrival at the protégé's classroom, you will check with the protégé to determine if there have been any changes in the protégé's lesson plans. During the actual observation, you will use the agreements (e.g., about length, focus, and recording method) that were made with the protégé during the pre-observation conference. It is important for you to concentrate on the mutually agreed-on focus.

Note that you might observe an inappropriate practice that was not identified as part of the agreed-on focus. If the practice involves a health and safety issue, address it immediately. For other issues, take note of the concern and address it at a more appropriate time.

What Mentor-Coaches Can Do:

- Maintain an open and friendly manner in the classroom.
- Tell children that you (an observer) are here to watch them play.
- Focus on the protégé's practice and her interactions with children, not only on the children.
- Strive to record observations according to the agreed on pre-observation conference.
- Keep the documentation objective by recording exactly what they see and hear. (See **STEP-Doc 2.2h: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording.**)

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.

CONDUCTING AN OBSERVATION

1. Putting the protégé and the children at ease during the observation is a common challenge. So is maintaining the focus agreed to 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?

OBSERVER BIAS

One of the hardest tasks is to learn to suspend prejudgment, to become acquainted with one’s own defense mechanisms, to correct for expectations and preconceptions so as to be able to “see” and “hear” more accurately what is going on.

— E. H. Schein (1987)

Unit 1 presented a general definition of bias. In this module, you will learn about a specific type of bias related to observation. Each person brings his or her own unique experiences, education, and values to interactions with others. All of us look at events through different "lenses" formed by our culture and experiences. It is vital for you to be aware of the various "lenses" you may use when observing a protégé.

Understanding your protégé’s culture, values, preferences, and learning styles is essential. Such understanding is the foundation of strong relationships between you and your protégés. It is also the key to unbiased observation.

Observer bias prevents someone from seeing a situation or a person objectively. Biases may be subtle and lie below the level of consciousness. As a Mentor-Coach, your preconceptions and biases affect what you pay attention to during an observation and influence the judgments you make. To effectively support protégés as unbiased observers, you must be ready to recognize and let go of all of your assumptions and “lenses.”

Common Observer Biases:

- Halo effect
- Horns effect
- Middle-of-the-road effect.

To overcome or minimize the effects of biases, you can:

- Become aware of the lenses you bring.
- Talk about beliefs and values with protégés.
- Use formal observation tools that give observers objective criteria.
- Follow guidelines for accurate and objective recording.

The scenarios on the following page will be used to begin a discussion about observer bias. As you listen to your facilitator read one of them, consider the following questions and record your thoughts and ideas.

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 overcome or minimize the effects of bias in her observation?

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?

OBSERVER BIAS SCENARIOS

1. Maria, a Mentor-Coach, is observing her protégé, Lynn, at the writing center. A little girl is scribbling on an envelope. Lynn asks the child if she is trying to write her name. Then, Lynn helps the child to form the letters. In completing her program's own literacy checklist, Maria gives Lynn a 3 out of 5 on the item "Provides Responsive Support to the Children at the Writing Center."

During the post-observation conference, Lynn is very surprised by Maria's rating. After all, Lynn noticed that the little girl was trying to write her name and responded by helping her.

After a lot of discussion, Maria tells Lynn that she expected her to put her hand on the child's shoulder. She also expected Lynn to use the child's name—maybe even her pet name. Maria believes that showing affection is a big part of being responsive. In her view, Lynn failed to make the kind of connection that best supports children in early writing.

2. Kim and her fellow Mentor-Coaches meet to talk about the literacy observations they just completed using the ELLCO. Kim's protégés always score higher than other Mentor-Coaches' protégés. Kim wonders why this is so. As a group, Kim and Davida, a colleague, talk about what they look for on some of the items. Kim realizes that she scores items higher than Davida, even when it seems that they observe nearly the same classroom practices. What could be the reasons behind Kim's unusually high scores?

3. Rhoda is the Mentor-Coach for four protégés. She has been in the early childhood field for many years. She feels that early childhood staff must present themselves as professionals to the outside world. At her first meeting with Yvonne, Rhoda instantly dislikes Yvonne's clothing. Yvonne's short skirt and low-cut blouse do not match Rhoda's idea of how a professional should dress. When Rhoda observes Yvonne supporting children's writing, Yvonne is wearing similar clothes.

Rhoda notices examples of children's writing in Yvonne's room, but not as many as she expected. She marks Yvonne low on several sections on the program's literacy observation tool. After she tunes in to a conversation that Yvonne is having with three children in the block area, she begins to question her ratings. Yvonne supports the children in drawing and labeling a blueprint of the bridge they had just built. She helps them write their names on the blueprint. She also prints the words that they dictate to her. Rhoda couldn't do better herself. Rhoda wonders if her concerns about Yvonne's dress are affecting her objectivity.

SUPPORTING CHILDREN’S EARLY WRITING AND ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

Preparing the Youngest Children for Writing

Young children develop skills, knowledge, and attitudes about literacy even before they can read and write in adult ways. Infants are developing important fine motor skills that influence their later attempts at writing and other tasks. Toddlers are building and refining their ability to grasp and use writing tools to make marks. Providing support for these developing fine motor skills and for eye-hand coordination is essential for these age groups.

Even before the preschool years, children benefit from having many opportunities to scribble, draw, and write. They also begin to learn about the purposes of writing by observing adults.

What Protégés and Parents Can Do:

- Provide materials and activities to build eye-hand coordination and fine motor skills needed for later writing (e.g., large peg boards, stacking blocks, stringing beads, play dough).
- Provide a variety of age-appropriate writing materials (e.g., large markers and crayons).
- Allow many opportunities for scribbling, drawing, and writing with appropriate supervision and support.

What Mentor-Coaches Can Do:

- Be knowledgeable about early writing development.
- Understand and model appropriate strategies and activities for this age group.

VIDEO CLIP: Early Writing

This video clip shows infants and toddlers engaged in fine-motor activities. The Mentor-Coaches discuss ways to support young children’s early writing skills.

Preschool children should have access to a wide variety of writing materials and plenty of time to engage in writing and drawing activities. They also benefit from having opportunities to practice purposeful writing, such as “writing” their names on the daily sign-in sheet, labeling a block creation, and sending letters to peers or relatives. Protégés’ interactions with children about their writing attempts—“I’m sure that your grandmother will enjoy your letter,” or “I see that you started at the top of the page when you made your list”—help children to understand writing concepts.

Protégés support early writing skills in preschoolers by:

- Creating inviting writing centers containing a wide variety of materials
- Putting writing tools in other areas of the classroom like the block and dramatic play areas or centers
- Planning activities to encourage writing, such as creating journals
- Introducing writing concepts by talking to children about their work
- Taking dictation of children’s words and stories
- Modeling writing for various purposes
- Talk about how letters are formed while writing
- Engaging children in conversations about their writing.

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.

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.

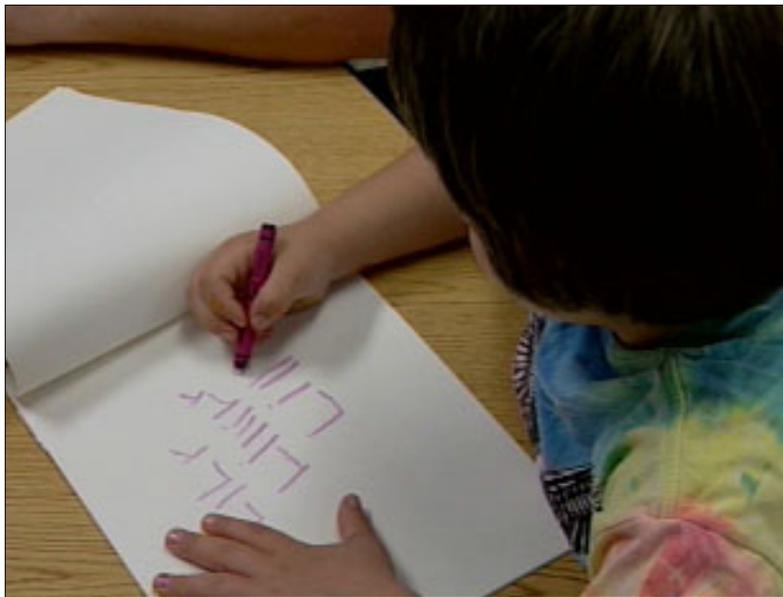
SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S WRITING

Take some time to reflect on the practices of protégés that you are currently mentoring or those you may have mentored in the past.

- 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?



Using the Classroom Environment to Support Alphabet Learning

There are many ways that the environment supports alphabet knowledge. In center-based programs, protégés can design the environment with materials that will create meaningful opportunities for children to learn the alphabet. In home-based programs, they can create specific areas for reading and dramatic play with books, maps, menus, and magazines.

What Protégés Can Do:

- Display children’s names and simple printed words in toddler spaces.
- Hang the alphabet at children’s eye level.
- Display schedules, attendance charts, signs, and rules in preschool rooms.
- Display names and labels around the room that expose children to conventional print—initial letter in upper case, followed by lower-case letters.
- Provide children with access to puzzles, alphabet blocks, magnetic letters, and letter stamps showing both upper- and lower-case letters.
- Supply the preschool writing center with word rings, name cards, alphabet strips.
- Furnish the library area with a variety of alphabet books.

VIDEO CLIP: Alphabet Knowledge

This video shows a teacher 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 another teacher in California uses an activity with play dough and alphabet shapes to expose toddlers to the alphabet.

ALPHABET KNOWLEDGE

Reflect on your own experiences in working with protégés to teach children about the alphabet.

- 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?



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.

You will now score item 10P using the ELLCO section printed on the following page. Be ready to talk about the score you used and the evidence you have for the score.

ELLCO Section 10P: Approaches to Children’s Writing

| | | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--|--|--|---|-------|---|-----------|
| | | Exemplary | | Basic | | Deficient |
| <p>ELLCO</p> <p>Language, Literacy, and Curriculum</p> <p>10P. Approaches to Children’s Writing <i>Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Version</i></p> <p>Evidence: <i>Observations of writing materials, and opportunities for children and teachers to be engaged in writing</i></p> <p>Notes:</p> | <p>There is strong evidence of a systematic approach to children’s writing that supports their development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Multiple motivations and opportunities are provided within the classroom for children to see writing and to use their emergent writing skills. Writing is differentiated from art activities. A variety of helpful materials and tools are accessible to support children’s writing (e.g., types of writing implements, alphabet, word cards, lined paper). When appropriate, instruction in writing is provided (e.g., helping children form letters, recognize letters, read and write words). Teachers are regularly available to support and encourage all children’s writing efforts, which may include taking dictation, writing group stories, or engaging in real and pretend writing with children. | <p>There is evidence of a systematic approach to children’s writing that supports their development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some opportunities and materials are provided within the classroom for children to see writing and to use their emergent writing skills. Some materials are available for children to use for writing activities. When appropriate, instruction in writing is provided (e.g., helping children write their own names). Teachers are occasionally available to support children’s writing efforts, which may include taking dictation, writing group stories, or engaging in real and pretend writing with children. | <p>There is minimal evidence of a systematic approach to children’s writing that supports their development.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few or no opportunities or materials are provided within the classroom for children to see writing or to use their emergent writing skills. Specific materials or tools to support children’s writing are not evident. If instruction in writing is provided, it may be ineffective or inappropriate (e.g., children must all practice a certain letter at a certain time). Teachers are not regularly available to support all children’s writing efforts and may discourage some children from writing attempts. | | | |
| | <p>Score: <input type="text"/></p> | | | | | |

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Observation of a Preschool Classroom: Contents of the Classroom

You will now have an opportunity to observe how children’s learning is supported through the organization and content of play materials. Before you view the video clip, you can familiarize yourself with the ELLCO score sheet on the following page.

When the video begins, be sure to pay close attention to the organization and content of the dramatic-play materials. Use the space below to record evidence related to Item 2 on the ELLCO.

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.

You will now score item 2 using the ELLCO section printed on the following page. Be ready to talk about the score you used and the evidence you have for the score.

ELLCO Section 2: Contents of the Classroom

| Classroom Observation | | General Classroom Environment | | | | |
|---|---|---|--|--|------------------------------------|----------------|
| | | 5 Exemplary | 4 | 3 Basic | 2 | 1 Deficient |
| <p>2. Contents of the Classroom</p> <p>Evidence: <i>Organization and content of materials and classroom displays</i></p> <p>Notes:</p> | <p>There is strong evidence of an intentional approach to the organization of materials and displays, coordinated with ongoing learning goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials are clearly organized in conceptually related groups and are appealing and accessible to children. For example, a science area might contain small magnifying glasses, "samples" to magnify, and pencils and paper for drawing and recording observations. The materials and their organization suggest particular purposes to children. | <p>There is some evidence of an intentional approach to the organization of materials and displays, coordinated with ongoing learning goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some materials are organized in conceptually related groups, but appeal or accessibility to children may be limited. For example, a science area might contain small magnifying glasses, paint color samples, a rock collection, an aquarium, and tweezers. The materials are all science-related, but the links among the materials themselves are not evident. | <p>There is minimal evidence of an intentional approach to the organization of materials and displays, coordinated with ongoing learning goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials may be stored or arranged in a haphazard manner that limits their appeal and accessibility to children. For example, in an art area, markers may be out of ink, watercolors dried out, or colored pencils unsharpened. | <p>There is little or no relationship between displays and current classroom investigations. Teacher-generated displays may predominate.</p> | <p>Score: <input type="text"/></p> | |
| | <p>There is strong evidence of an intentional approach to the organization of materials and displays, coordinated with ongoing learning goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials are clearly organized in conceptually related groups and are appealing and accessible to children. For example, a science area might contain small magnifying glasses, "samples" to magnify, and pencils and paper for drawing and recording observations. The materials and their organization suggest particular purposes to children. | <p>There is some evidence of an intentional approach to the organization of materials and displays, coordinated with ongoing learning goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some materials are organized in conceptually related groups, but appeal or accessibility to children may be limited. For example, a science area might contain small magnifying glasses, paint color samples, a rock collection, an aquarium, and tweezers. The materials are all science-related, but the links among the materials themselves are not evident. | <p>There is minimal evidence of an intentional approach to the organization of materials and displays, coordinated with ongoing learning goals.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Materials may be stored or arranged in a haphazard manner that limits their appeal and accessibility to children. For example, in an art area, markers may be out of ink, watercolors dried out, or colored pencils unsharpened. | <p>There is little or no relationship between displays and current classroom investigations. Teacher-generated displays may predominate.</p> | <p>Score: <input type="text"/></p> | |

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Summary Presentation

In this TVI, you’ve explored ways to use the Professional Conferencing Process to collaborate with your protégés as they reflect on their practice. You have also looked in detail at the first two steps: the pre-observation conference and the observation.

Effectively setting the stage for observation with your protégé requires a trusting Mentor-Coach and protégé relationship. The pre-observation conference, if done with care and respect, can also help the relationship to continue to grow.

What Mentor-Coaches Can Do:

- Bring to the observation an in-depth knowledge of how adults learn and an understanding of ways to support children’s growth in relation to the language and literacy outcomes.
- Collaborate with protégés to set the purpose, goals, methods, and time of the observation.
- Be aware of and control for protégés’ biases, as well as your own.
- Know how to use observation tools to guide protégés’ observations.
- Use the observation to individualize your support to protégés.

THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Think back on the information in this module:

- Learning about the five-step Professional Conferencing Process
- Learning the function and purpose of observation
- Learning the strengths and limitations of several types of observation tools
- Being better able to prepare for a pre-observation conference
- Learning to use sections of one formal observation tool for language and literacy
- Deepening awareness of what children should know and be able to do in relation to early writing and alphabet knowledge
- Being better able to assess the quality of a protégé's practices in early writing and alphabet knowledge
- Being more aware of the role of objectivity in observation
- Reflecting on and strengthening your ability to observe protégés.

Take a few moments to reflect on these questions:

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?

Based on your reflections, revisit your Professional Development Plan and make any necessary updates.

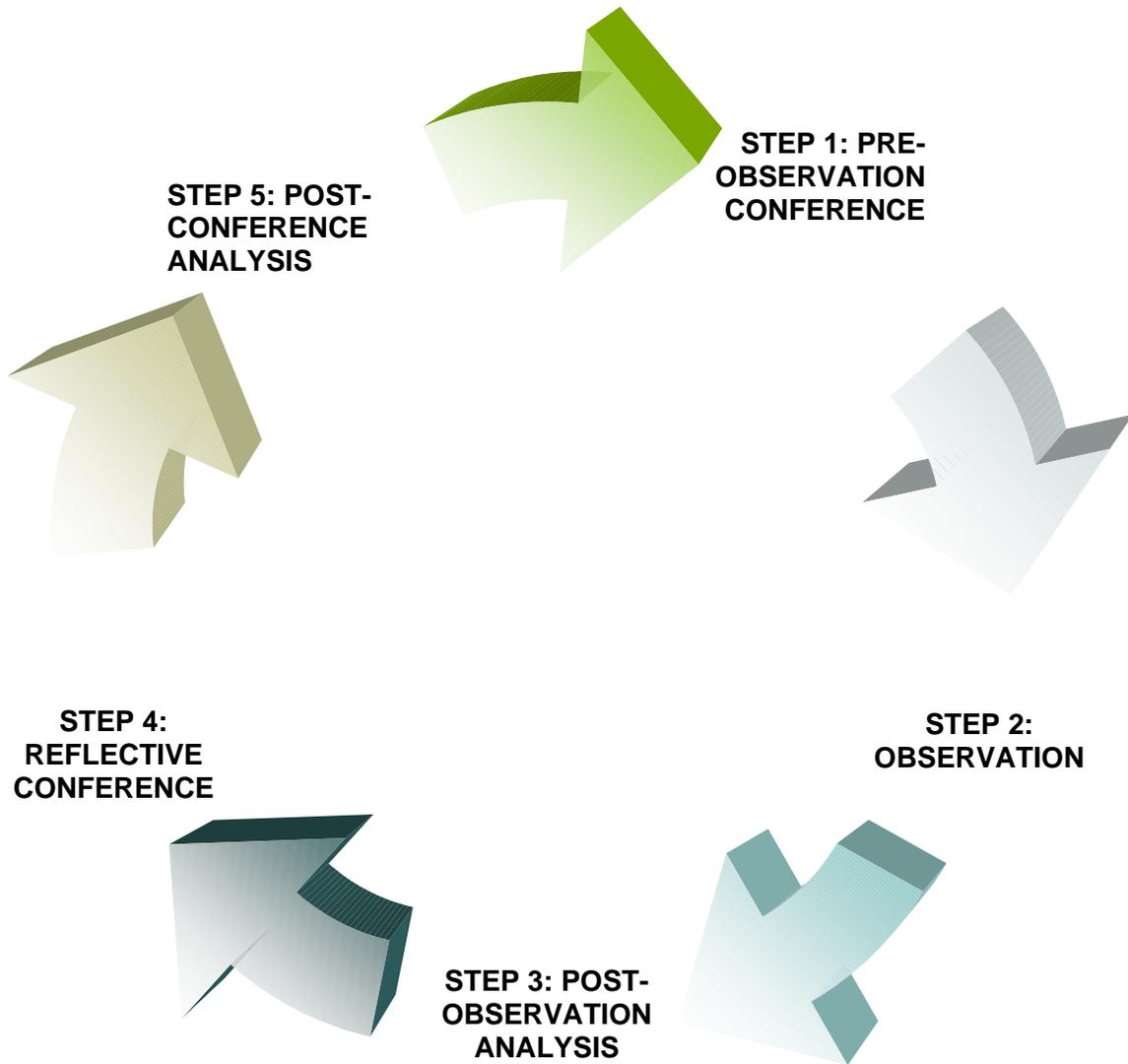
WRAP-UP

Continue on to the next module in this unit (Unit 2, Module 3). Note the time and location that the session will be offered.

Remember that resources for this unit are at the back of your manual.

STEP-Doc 2.2a

**PROFESSIONAL CONFERENCING
GUIDE**



**STEP-Doc 2.2b:
Open Method Example***

DATE: _____ CENTER: _____

TEACHERS: _____ TIME: _____

| |
|---|
| Classroom Environment |
| Circle Activities |
| Dramatic Play |
| Block Area |
| Literacy |
| Science/Math |
| Sensory |
| Art |
| Staff-Directed Activities |
| Classroom Management/Transitions |

*This observation form was developed for demonstration purposes only.

**STEP-Doc 2.2c:
Closed Method Example***

DATE: _____ CENTER: _____

TEACHERS: _____ TIME: _____

| Preschool Literacy Observations | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there a variety of books available to the children in all centers of the classroom? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there an area just for reading books? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a writing center? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the writing center have a variety of materials available? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is children’s work displayed on the walls at their eye level? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is an alphabet visible at children’s eye level? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are the classroom areas clearly labeled with print? | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there evidence of environmental print such as charts, attendance, labels, and schedule? | | |

*This observation form was developed for demonstration purposes only.

**STEP-Doc 2.2d:
Combined Method Example***

DATE: _____ CENTER: _____

TEACHERS: _____ TIME: _____

| Preschool Literacy Observations | Yes | No | Comments |
|---|-----|----|----------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a variety of books available to the children in all centers of the classroom? | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there an area just for reading books? | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there a writing center? | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the writing center have a variety of materials available? | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is children’s work displayed on the walls at their eye level? | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is an alphabet visible at children’s eye level? | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are the classroom areas clearly labeled with print? | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is there evidence of environmental print such as charts, attendance, labels and schedule? | | | |

*This observation form was developed for demonstration purposes only.

STEP-Doc 2.2e: Overview of Formal Classroom Observation Tools

EARLY LANGUAGE AND LITERACY CLASSROOM OBSERVATION TOOLKIT (ELLCO)

Authors and Year: Miriam W. Smith, David K. Dickinson, Angela Sangeorge, and Louisa Anastasopoulos, 2002

Publisher: Brookes Publishing Company, P.O. Box 10624, Baltimore, MD 21285. Tel. 800-638-3775, www.brookespublishing.com

Description: The ELLCO Toolkit provides a set of comprehensive observation tools for rating the quality of language- and literacy-related classroom environments and activities. It identifies teacher practice and environmental factors that support and/or detract from children's language and literacy development. The ELLCO is a research-based tool, grounded in the latest research about language and literacy development.

Age Range: Preschool through Grade 3

Administration Time: 1–1 1/2 hours

Administrators: Researchers, supervisors, program directors, principals, administrators, and teachers

Language and Literacy Domains: Literacy Environment Checklist component examines book area, book selection and use, and writing materials. Classroom Observation and Teacher Interview component examines the general classroom environment and language, literacy, and curriculum practices. Literacy Activities Rating Scale examines book reading and writing activities.

EARLY CHILDHOOD ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE, REVISED EDITION (ECERS-R)

Authors and Year: Thelma Harms, Richard M. Clifford, and Debbie Cryer, 1998

Publisher: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027. Tel. 800-575-6566. www.tcpress.com

Description: The ECERS-R provides a set of rating scales with interview questions to assess the quality of early childhood classroom environments and practices. The tool examines space and furnishings, personal-care routines, language and reasoning, activities, interaction, and program structure. It looks at parents' and staff's roles. The revised edition includes additional items, such as inclusive and culturally sensitive indicators, nature/science activities, math/number activities, and staff-child interactions.

Age Range: 2 1/2 – 5 years old

Administration Time: 2 hours

Administrators: Program directors, consultants, licensing personnel, teachers, and researchers

Language and Literacy Domains: Language and Reasoning sections examine presence and use of books and pictures, and how the staff supports children's language to communicate, reason, and converse informally.

INFANT-TODDLER ENVIRONMENT RATING SCALE, REVISED EDITION (ITERS-R)

Authors and Year: Thelma Harms, Debbie Cryer, and Richard M. Clifford, 2003

Publisher: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027. Tel. 800-575-6566. www.tcpress.com

Description: The ITERS-R provides a comprehensive set of rating scales to assess the quality of environments and practices for infant-toddler care programs. The tool examines furnishings and displays for children, personal-care routines, listening and talking, learning activities, interaction, program structure, and adult needs.

Age Range: Birth – 2 1/2 years

Administration Time: 2 hours

Administrators: Child-care staff, directors, supervisors, and/or researchers

Language and Literacy Domains: Listening and Talking examines informal use of language, and presence and use of books and pictures.

THE FAMILY DAY-CARE RATING SCALE (FDCRS)

Authors and Year: Thelma Harms and Richard M. Clifford, 1989

Publisher: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027. Tel. 800-575-6566. www.tcpress.com

Description: The FDCRS is designed to assess the quality of home-based family child care programs. The tool consists of comprehensive rating scales that examine space and furnishings for care and learning, basic care, language and reasoning, learning activities, social development, adult needs, and provisions for exceptional children.

Age Range: Birth – 5 years

Administration Time: 2 hours

Administrators: Child care providers, supervisors, trainers, and researchers

Language and Literacy Domains: Language and reasoning, including how staff supports informal use of language; helping children understand language; helping children use language; and helping children reason.

STEP- Doc 2.2f: Professional Conferencing Guide¹

STEP 1: PRE-OBSERVATION CONFERENCE

ESTABLISH A FOCUS AND GOALS FOR THE OBSERVATION

- **Help your protégés identify an appropriate goal** for the observation. What do the protégés want the children to gain? How will they support their learning? What aspect of their teaching do they want to reflect on in the conference?

DISCUSS CONCERNS THAT MAY HAVE ARISEN SINCE THE LAST INTERACTION

- **Find out about important classroom events** that may affect your observation. Help the protégés if they have concerns about how they are addressing these.

SCHEDULE THE OBSERVATION AND REFLECTIVE CONFERENCE

- **Schedule the observation** for an appropriate time so you can see the activities related to the teacher's goal.
- **Schedule the reflective conference.** Allow yourself time to prepare. Be sure it is not too long after the observation.
- **Take time to plan** your approach to the observation. Given the protégé's goal, what aspects of the environment and the interactions do you want to attend to? Note these for reference during the observation.

STEP 2: OBSERVATION

STICK TO THE PLAN

- **Be sure to focus on the agreed-on plan**, attending to the protégé's goals.
- **Use your notes** about relevant aspects of the environment and interactions to keep you focused.
- **Pay attention** to the protégé's approach *and* the children's engagement.

¹ Adapted from *Content Focused Mentoring Program*. Copyright 2004 by Education Development Center, Inc. All rights reserved. Adapted with permission from the copyright owner.

STEP 2: OBSERVATION (continued)**DOCUMENT**

- **Record objective notes** about what you see and hear. Note both your objective observations and questions or comments that come to mind as you watch and listen.

STEP 3: POST-OBSERVATION ANALYSIS**ANALYZE YOUR OBSERVATION**

- **Ask yourself what you have learned** about your protégé's teaching and children's learning. Consider these questions:
 - What were the critical events? Were there any clear patterns?
 - What are the protégé's strengths?
 - Did the protégé miss chances to support conceptual learning? Did the protégé miss chances to enhance language and literacy development?
 - What do I want to accomplish with my protégé in the reflective conference?

STEP 4: REFLECTIVE CONFERENCE**PLAN YOUR REFLECTIVE CONFERENCE**

- **Use the principles for reflective conferencing as you plan.** How will you...
 - encourage and value the protégé's voice?
 - promote protégé reflection?
 - challenge thinking?
 - build on strengths?
 - focus on achievable goals?
- **Create open-ended questions.** You want to ask questions that encourage the protégé's reflection. Ask if the protégé feels that she or he achieved the goal. Ask what she or he noticed about the children's engagement and learning. Also, ask the protégé if she or he was surprised about how it went.

STEP 4: REFLECTIVE CONFERENCE (continued)

- **Plan how you will introduce a challenge.** How will you challenge the protégé to think about her or his work in a new way? How can you use your observations of the children's engagement and participation to help the protégé make insightful connections between teaching and learning?
- **Think through several scenarios.** How might the protégé react to your challenge? What past observations have you made that suggest possible reactions? Think through several possibilities.
- **Consider possible next steps.** What will help the protégé move on in her or his development? Is there something you might model for her or him or an opportunity for co-teaching? Might an observation in another classroom help, or a reading? Have several ideas to draw on during the conference.

ENCOURAGE REFLECTION DURING THE CONFERENCE

- **Begin by reviewing the goals and focus of the conference.** Review what you talked about in the pre-observation conference. Confirm the protégé's goals and the focus of the observation.
- **Let the protégé comment first.** Invite your protégé to share thoughts about the effectiveness of the teaching during the observation. Use questions like:
 - What did you think about the activities I observed?
 - How effective do you think you were at achieving your goals?
 - What were you trying to accomplish? Did it work? Why? Why not?
- **Use questions and comments** to draw out the protégé's thoughts and feelings about her or his teaching. Help the protégé to connect teaching practices to the children's learning. Acknowledge your protégé's insights. Use questions and comments like:
 - What do you think you did that contributed to these behaviors from the children?
 - Do you see any patterns developing?
 - That is a nice example of ... (cite a child outcome or learning goal).
 - Explain more to me.
- **Share your own observations.** Once your protégé has shared her or his thoughts and ideas, introduce some of your insights. You might cite more evidence of how the goal was met or whether key points were missed.

STEP 4: REFLECTIVE CONFERENCE (continued)**CHALLENGE YOUR PROTÉGÉ'S THINKING**

- **Address your protégé's teaching challenges.** Sometimes, these challenges are obvious to the protégé. Other times, you will need to point them out.
- **Connect practices and children's responses.** Help your protégé see the link between her or his teaching and children's learning. Give examples from the observation.
- **Think about why your protégé might be struggling.** As you consider your next steps, think about some of the reasons why your protégé might be having a hard time trying new behaviors. Is your protégé challenged because of limited foundational knowledge, conflict of beliefs, or complexity of change?
- **Share your own perspective.** Strive to open up the protégé's thinking to new perspectives about how to meet child outcomes.
- **Address differences of opinion.** Look for a place where you and your protégé can agree. You might go back to a shared value discussed earlier, as you address the point on which you differ. "We both agreed that it is important to encourage language development from the beginning. This is one of the ways I see that happening." In other situations you might pose a question to explore together. A reading, a formal observation, or an interview with an expert could provide further information that will help you address your differences.

CONCLUDE THE CONFERENCE

- **Review the highlights** of the conference. Make sure to review the challenges discussed and the protégé's goal.
- **Identify strategies** that will help to improve practices and support children's learning.
- **Plan next steps** that will help meet the protégé's goal. Set a timeline and identify necessary resources. Next steps might include:
 - A reading
 - A visit to observe another teacher
 - The Mentor-Coach modeling or co-teaching in the protégé's classroom
 - A follow-up focused observation by the Mentor-Coach.

STEP 5: POST-CONFERENCE ANALYSIS**REFLECT ON YOUR GOALS**

- **Reflect on your goals** for the conference. Consider these questions:
 - Were you successful in achieving your goals?
 - How did you help your protégé reflect on her or his teaching practices?
 - What were some challenges or missed opportunities?

- **Identify goals for your next conference.** Think about what you will do differently. Decide on the steps you will take to achieve these goals. Think about talking to other Mentor-Coaches about their experiences with reflective conferencing. Consider sharing a reading with your protégé or reading for your own growth. Also think about videotaping the next conference with your protégé.

STEP- Doc 2.2g: Pre-Observation Conference Tips

Share the following Mentor-Coach “rules of thumb” with your protégé:

- Observation in mentoring is not evaluative.
- Observation helps the Mentor-Coach to individualize mentoring approaches and to set goals with the protégé.
- Together, the Mentor-Coach and protégé establish a focus for the observation.
- The observation concentrates on the mutually agreed-on focus.
- Observation is part of the five-step Professional Conferencing Process.

The following statements and questions will help guide and focus a pre-observation conference with your protégé:

- *Tell me about the purpose of this observation.*
- *Describe what will you be doing with the children and what you hope they will learn.*
- *Let's look at your curriculum plan together.*
- *Explain what led up to this curriculum plan.*
- *Let's talk about the teaching strategies will you use.*
- *How shall I document the information?*
- *Tell me about the children and families in your classroom. What do I need to know about special needs, language, and cultural considerations?*
- *Let's talk about how you have adjusted your practice to meet the needs of children and families from different cultural backgrounds.*

STEP- Doc 2.2h: Guidelines for Accurate and Objective Recording

- **Record only the facts and record every detail without omitting anything.**

Include specific details about the situation. Record the number of children and adults at an activity, area in classroom, time of day, type of materials, or title of book being read.

For example:

*There were 15 children in the classroom and three adults. In one area, the protégé, Marianne, sat with three children on the couch in the book area and read *Waiting for Wings*, by Lois Ehlert. At the large table, the assistant, Irene, was beginning to set out food for lunch. Several of the children were playing a game of “keep-away” with a ball. The third adult, John, was showing children how to use crayons and construction paper to make birds.*

- **Record quotes from both staff and children.**

Exact quotes from staff and children will help create a complete picture of what happened during the observation.

Marianne said to the children who were playing with the ball, “Will you please take the game over to the other side of the room? I am trying to set the table.”

- **Use action words (verbs) whenever possible.**

The children with the ball did not move away from the table. They continued to play their game and their voices were rising with their excitement.

- **Observe without interpreting. Record only what you see or hear. Be careful to avoid recording something that did not occur. And use words that describe but do not judge.**

For example:

Lunchtime was way too noisy and chaotic. The children who were playing with the ball ignored the teachers. They were disrupting the lunchtime for the other children. Once they were finished eating, the teacher didn't seem to care that they were running around.

This observation makes many judgments about the observation.

Instead, record exactly what happened:

Once they had finished eating, the children who were playing with the ball went back to their game while Irene was clearing the table. These children were laughing and calling to each other loudly. The three children who were reading with Marianne got up from the lunch table when they were finished eating and went back to the book corner while Marianne helped Irene sweep the floor.

- **Record facts in the order they occur. Order makes a difference.**

Try to document the sequential details of an event as it begins, and describe how it unfolds and concludes. For example, record a book-reading session or lunchtime transition from start to finish.

Adapted from U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families (2001). *Training Guides for the Head Start Learning Community. Observation and Recording: Tools for Decision Making.* Washington, D.C.