

MODULE 4

USING VIDEO TO DOCUMENT CHILDREN'S LEARNING

CONTEXT

Using different media, such as photos, video, or audio tape, to document children's learning, broadens the information gathered for ongoing child assessments and individualizing instruction. These media enrich our perceptions of and reactions to events. Audio tapes, for example, allow us to listen to and hear both the primary and side-line conversations. Photographs capture a story in a way that print alone cannot. There are additional benefits from using video recordings. Which medium gives you more information, looking at photographs of a story or seeing a movie? Which grabs your attention and imagination? Which provides more detail?

In this module, you will apply video methods to the work you are doing with protégés. You will read background information on confidentiality. Finally, you will receive pointers for choosing video equipment, lighting, and microphones.

TIME: 2 hours 20 minutes

OVERVIEW

- Exercise 1: Reflecting on Your Media Experiences (10 minutes)
- Exercise 2: Background Reading—Using Video Recording to Support Staff and Child Observation (30 minutes)
- Exercise 3: Confidentiality in Video Recording (30 minutes)
- Exercise 4: Videotaping in Your Classroom (1 hour)
- Exercise 5: Mentor-Coach Professional Development Plan (10 minutes).

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By completing this module, you will:

- Gain knowledge about using video with protégés to record and review events in children's daily activities
- Examine confidentiality issues particular to videotaping
- Learn technical information about cameras, microphones, and lighting.



EXERCISE 1: REFLECTING ON YOUR MEDIA EXPERIENCES

Use these questions to reflect on your experiences using various media devices.

1. How have you used videotaping or digital camcorders, audio-taping, or photos to record classroom observations of protégés and children?

2. How and when have you used these different media to develop collections for children's portfolios? How was the equipment used? How did information collected enhance the child's portfolio?

3. Have you used these media for observation of protégés or for supervision? How was the equipment used?

4. What were (or could be) the benefits of using each or any of these media?

EXERCISE 2: BACKGROUND READING—USING VIDEO RECORDING TO SUPPORT STAFF AND CHILD OBSERVATION

This reading provides information and tips on how to use video recording to support classroom observation and observation of children.

Have you ever been in this situation, either as an observer or as the person being observed? A lesson has been prepared and discussed. The teacher or protégé has followed the plan and done well. After the observation is completed, the observer comments on the actions of one child or a small group or children. The teacher or the protégé is totally surprised and admits that she did not notice what the observer reported at all.

At first glance, video documentation may seem just like other observation methods. However, there are several advantages. Video observation supports the best principles and reasons for observing. Videotaping supports you, the Mentor-Coach, as you work through your observations with protégés by:

- Supporting a more-objective view. The record is made as it is recorded without changes in details or events.
- Adding sound and sequence to an observation. Events and behaviors that may not have been noticed in the teaching situation may be captured by the video camera.
- Providing real-time documentation. Without relying on the speed of note-taking, video footage preserves everything within its field.
- Broadening the observer's field of vision. Using different kinds of lenses allows for many options: a whole classroom with all of its activity, specific activities, interactions between children, or between protégés and children.

You, the Mentor-Coach, and your protégé can revisit a situation together, comparing and confirming your observations, memories, and interpretations. Video facilitates revisiting behaviors and responses in order to better

understand children's thinking. Having video-taped situations contributes to the documentation of children's progress over time. Children's strengths, errors, and misunderstandings can be reviewed and analyzed. Next steps can be planned.

Teachers revisit documentation to better understand children's thinking and to inform their teaching practice. They revisit children's work to see what just occurred, to listen again, and to gain further understanding.

—S. B. Hong and J. T. Broderick (2003)

You and your protégé can tailor the way you use video. You can:

- Script an observation. This may come out of a pre-conference or a general discussion. In this case you decide on a focus for the videotaping, select the time, place, and routine of the day, and decide on any prompts that the protégé or you will use.
- Videotape a whole group, a small group, or an individual child.
- Designate one staff person to "shadow" a child throughout the day to gather elusive or unpredictable behaviors. The camera is turned on and off in order to capture the child's behaviors.
- Set up the camera and let it run, at circle time for instance. This is more of a documentary style.
- Use candid shots. Tape a few minutes at various times during the day. The video shoots could be taken at random or at fixed intervals during the day.

Videotaping can also be used to look at how home visitors are interacting with children and parents, and to help parents become better observers of their children. It is important to let parents know about the videotaping in advance if you plan to videotape in the home.

Reflection

Think of a time when videotaping an event or activity in your protégé's classroom would have helped you and your protégé better understand the kinds of skills children were acquiring and ways to better support their learning.

Describe the situation.

Brainstorm with your protégé about ways you can build videotaping into your work together. Or use this topic of discussion in a dialogue journal with your protégé.

Skills Review

Dialogue Journals are explained in Unit 3, Module 3.

EXERCISE 3: CONFIDENTIALITY IN VIDEO RECORDING

Conducting observations is vital to developing quality programs for children. At the same time, observation carries with it an ethical responsibility to protect the privacy of Head Start children and families. Take time to review the program's confidentiality policies in general, and in their application to videotaping, with your protégé. When in doubt, discuss issues with the education coordinator or program director. In most instances, it is wise to err on the side of caution. The rights of children and families should always come first.

Here are some guidelines for protecting the confidentiality of children and families:

- Obtain written parental consent before videotaping. If the program already does this, ask to see its documentation.
- Have a plan that will maintain confidentiality for a parent's contribution to the observation.
- Do not leave videos or other observations out where they can be seen by other staff or parents of other children.
- Discuss or provide access to written, photographed, or taped observation records for professionals only on a need-to-know basis, such as planning for transitions or referrals for more-intensive instructional supports.
- Obtain written parental consent before anyone other than the teacher, home visitor, or custodial parent or guardian is allowed access to the information.
- Keep videos in a safe, secure place. Store observations separately from records of children's work such as portfolios.
- Develop a policy on how long records are maintained.

After reading the background information on confidentiality in videotaping, do the following:

- Discuss the policies of the program with your protégé
- Develop a checklist that you could use with your protégé to ensure that confidentiality issues are addressed. Describe key features of the checklist in the space below.

- Check with the Head Start management staff to see if there are additional local confidentiality procedures or policies to be followed. Note them here.

EXERCISE 4: VIDEOTAPING IN YOUR CLASSROOM

Videotaping significantly added to the written and verbal exchanges. . . . Staff did not need to create or set up special activities, because taping was completed using regular, ongoing classroom activities.

—T. A. Hundt (2002).

The following information provides some basic suggestions for using videotaping in the classroom. The information is organized as follows: (1) video hardware; (2) getting past the “movie star” syndrome; (3) planning your “shoot”; and (4) some basic rules.

VIDEO HARDWARE

Videotaping is easier than it has ever been. Cameras are not only less expensive, they are easy to operate and their picture quality keeps getting better. But even with these improved tools, making tapes or other video media, such as DVDs, that are useful for analysis takes careful planning and some practice. Let’s look at the hardware for a minute. You need a camera, a tripod, and a microphone (an external microphone is preferred, in addition to the one that is part of the camera).

Cameras

There are no special requirements. Almost any camera made in the last ten years will do, if it has been maintained. Be aware, though, that if you are using an old format, like 8mm tape, you may be the only person with equipment to play the tape. Most cameras today are digital and use Mini-DV tape. The image quality is good, and even the least-expensive cameras should be fine for the classroom. The only drawback to the lower-priced cameras is that they may not have an input for an external microphone, which we’ll discuss later.

Tripods

Even the least-expensive tripods should work. The tripod's job is to enable you to set the camera at the height and the angle you want and to hold it there. With the camera on a tripod, you and your classroom staff can give your attention to the children. When choosing a tripod, make sure that the base of the camera matches up with the head of the tripod. Most tripods use a standard screw size that should fit with your camera.

Microphones

Almost any camera you use will have a built-in microphone, but you will find that when you move the camera away from the children, the sound quality will suffer. If you are filming a group of children engaged in an activity, their conversation may be unintelligible. The sounds of speech can also be overwhelmed by the sounds of air-conditioning, traffic in the street, noises in the hall, and other sounds that we can largely filter out when we're listening, but which register all too clearly on the camera's microphone.

To get good sound you have to use the microphone as close as possible to the children who are speaking. With an external microphone you can do this while still keeping the camera at a distance. Of course, it is somewhat difficult to walk around like a talk show host, holding a microphone up to each child, so a good compromise to using built-in or hand-held microphones is to use a PZM microphone, also known as a boundary layer microphone, instead.

The PZM is designed to sit on a flat surface, such a table, or attach to a wall. With the microphone on a low table in front of a group of children you will get much cleaner sound than you will with the built-in camera microphone. (And, yes, if children are pounding on the table and shuffling papers about as you are recording, you will hear that, too!) You will need to connect the external microphone to the camera with a cable, which should come with the microphone. Use masking tape or duct tape to fasten the cable securely to the floor, after you've positioned the microphone where you will be using it.

GETTING PAST THE "MOVIE STAR" SYNDROME

The first time anyone brings a video camera to the classroom, a new element is being introduced, and children will naturally be curious. Many will be excited about "being on television." Take time to show them the camera and the microphone. If possible, connect the camera to a monitor and show them how they look on TV.

Once they are familiar with the equipment, the camera will be less of a distraction when you start taping. The best way to get "authentic" behavior in front of the camera is to have repeated taping sessions. When the camera becomes a regular part of the class routine, the children will pay less attention to it.

When taping the selected activity, place the camera on a tripod eight feet away and to the side. Most children will forget about being taped as they focus on the activity. If the children's behavior is being affected by the camera, move it further away.

Of course, the children are not the only ones who will be influenced by the presence of the camera. Staff members may find themselves "acting," wondering how they look, and losing their focus. Again, the best solution is to tape frequently. With time, the staff, too, will forget the camera is there.

Have fun! The tape can always be erased! Don't forget to turn the camera off when you have finished recording!

PLANNING YOUR TAPING SESSION

Start planning with these questions:

1. What is the purpose of the videotaping?

2. Who will be in the videotape?

3. What part of the daily routine or what activity will be taped?

4. What do you want to see and know when you are finished?

SOME BASIC RULES

- Keep the “camera work” simple, and let the children be the stars. Use the zoom control before you start shooting to determine how much will be in the camera’s view. After you start a shot, leave the zoom alone.
- Keep camera movement to a minimum. If you have to keep moving to follow a child’s movements, you need to make the shot wider, either by zooming out, or by moving the camera further away.
- Keep the tape running to get everything you need. Shoot more rather than less. You will learn more from a continuous five-minute shot of children in an activity than you will from five seconds from one angle, ten seconds from another, six seconds up close, and so on.
- Use as much indoor light as possible.
- Position the camera so that any windows are behind it. Shooting into the light of a window washes out the image that the camera records.
- If you are shooting interaction between a staff member and the children, place the camera so you can see all the faces. If you have an external microphone, place it between the staff member and the children.
- Find as quiet a room as possible. The quieter the area, the better the sound quality.
- Test everything before you start. Shoot for a minute or two with the camera and microphone in the positions you expect to use. Position yourself where you expect to be in the picture and talk in your normal tone of voice. Then play the tape back and check it. Was there enough light to see your face? Could you understand what you were saying?

Everything is easier if you have an assistant to operate the camera, but often that won’t be possible. With a little advance preparation and the camera on a tripod, it’s not difficult to tape your own class. Keep the equipment out of the classroom paths of children.

Now that you have reviewed the basics, consider using these video suggestions.

With your protégé, address each of the following questions for a given scenario:

1. What is the purpose of the videotaping?

2. What does your protégé want to learn?

3. What outcomes or skills should be the focus of the videotaping?

4. Who will be in the videotape?

5. What part of the daily routine or what activity will be taped?

6. What do you, as the Mentor-Coach, expect to learn from the videotape that could lead to improved outcomes for children in language and literacy?

7. How will you and your protégé use the information to improve instructional practice?

8. Are there other uses for the videotaping methods?

Clarifying the videotape's purpose, participants, and desired outcomes will ensure that your videotape is more useful to you and your protégé.

Videotape an activity as planned. Review it with your protégé. Together, reflect on the experience, answering the following questions:

1. Did you achieve what you set out to accomplish with the videotape?

2. What was the value of videotaping the event? What did you learn about the children? About yourself?

3. What would you do differently the next time?

4. What other things can you do to help your protégé gather assessment information?

EXERCISE 5: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

As you have done for each session, take some time to reflect on your Professional Development Plan.

Write your thoughts in the spaces below:

1. What new understandings did you gain from this unit?

2. In what areas (language, literacy, observation, portfolios, assessment) will you continue to search for and use resources (reading, talking, attending conferences or courses, etc.)?

3. What are the most important applications of this information that you want to share and use with your protégé?

Congratulations, you have completed the final session of *Steps to Success*.

UNIT 4 REFERENCES

- Bardige, B., and Segal, M. (2004). Conversations in child care. *Zero to Three, 25 (1)*, 16–22.
- Bratton, L. S. (2001). Family centered assessment. *Head Start Bulletin, 70*, 25–27.
- Cohen, D. H., and Stern, V. (1983). *Observing and recording the behavior of young children*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- David, J., and Jones-Baker, F. (2001). From curriculum to outcomes: One program's experience. *Head Start Bulletin, 70*, 15–17.
- Hoffman, J., and Herren, J. K. (2003). How child outcomes assessment supports continuous program improvement. *Head Start Bulletin, 76*, 26–28.
- Hong, S. B., and Broderick, J. T. (2003). Instant video revisiting with children to enhance their learning: Video “frames” as learning tools. *Early Childhood Research and Practice, 5 (1)*. Retrieved May 3, 2004, from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v5n1/hong.html>
- Hundt, T. A. (2002). Videotaping young children in the classroom. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 34 (3)*, 38-43.
- Jablon, J., and Dombro, A. (2001). Using what you learn from observation: A form of assessment. *Head Start Bulletin, 70*, 5–8.
- Parlakian, R. (2004). Early literacy and very young children. *Zero to Three, 25 (1)*, 37–44.
- Schultz, T. (2001). Screening and assessment in Head Start. *Head Start Bulletin, 70*, 1, 3.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2003). *The Head Start leaders guide to positive child outcomes*. Washington, DC: Author.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families. (2003). *Head Start program performance standards*. Washington, DC: Author.