

Linda Warren: Once you have completed the pre-observation conference, it is time to think about the observation. One important step is to check back in with your protégé to determine if there have been any changes that would affect the agreed-upon observation plan. Let's take a look at some ways to make an observation a success. Focus on the agreed-upon area. Maintain an open and friendly manner. If the children ask what you are doing, tell them you are there to watch them play.

Focus on the protégé's practice and interaction with the children rather than on the children. Record observations according to the plan you and your protégé discussed. Document patterns or critical incidents that give clues to your protégé's understanding of children's learning. Write objective observations that state exactly what you see or hear the protégé doing. Now, let's go to Boston to see how one mentor-coach uses an observation tool in her protégé's toddler classroom.

[Music]

Valerie Alferd: I plan for a conference with my teachers. We talk about what tool we're going to use and then we come up with a time, a specific time in the classroom that works well for them. And I go over the tool with them to let them know what I'm looking for as far as the language piece and asking open-ended questions, not just looking for yes or no answers from the children, to expand their language.

When I go in I, I act - I, I smile but I don't really interact with the children because I want to stay, you know, distant from them. I don't, I don't want them to start talking to me and giving me toys to play with because that can really distract from the the observation. When I go in I try to be objective, I, focusing on what I -- what I hear and what I see, not what I think. I don't try to have my own opinions of what's good or bad, just basically I, I stay focused on what we agreed on.

I think it's very helpful to use the tool because we get into routines, and sometimes looking at a tool breaks us out of those routines because we we look at something differently. We have used these tools to help with professional development and it- it really helps support the teachers to see actually if they're doing better in other areas or if, where they need improvement and where they have excelled, also. [Music]

Linda: Valerie talks about the importance of recording what she actually sees and hears. Dee and Brenda, what else did Valerie share about her observation practices?

Dee Ard: Well, she talked about removing herself, backing up in the classroom, and separating herself from the children. And I find that since children are so curious, that I have to address that. And one way I do that is, you know, I will say, "I'm writing down some things that you're doing today, all the wonderful things that you're playing." So I model that writing. I let them look at the paper and then I will tell the children, "You know, Miss Dee is going to be writing all these things down and afterwards I will be playing with you."

So then you will have another opportunity built right in for some modeling for the teacher. Now I've also used some video, in the same respect with the video, you need to give the children some time to get used to that video so they will tune that out and give all their attention to the teacher. And the video is a great opportunity for the teachers. They know it's not evaluation so they know it's a learning tool. So when they see the video from your observation, they can look at all the different points saying, "Ooo, I didn't know I did that," and "Oh my, I didn't know I did that quite that way." So it is a great, great tool.

Linda: Brenda, what have been your experiences?

Brenda Eliand-Williford: Well, I was just noting from the video clip that the mentor-coach talked about making objective observations of what she was seeing and not being subjective and putting her, what she thought was going on, but really writing down what she saw. And that is so important to the observation process.

And we, in our program, we also talk to teachers about when you're writing down your observations to also write down questions that you may have that you're seeing within the classroom, that you want to go back and get clarification on when you're talking with the teacher during the conference session. It's important to write those questions because you don't want to assume that certain things are going on.

You want to hear from the teacher about what may have happened the day before that may have caused her to set up her classroom a certain way or to interact with a certain child in a particular way. So writing those questions down during the observation is important.

Being very objective during the observation time is important, and also looking at the setting and documenting what the children are doing, what time within the daily routine things are happening. So

that when you have the time with the teacher you can be very specific and you can really focus in on those areas that you want to talk with the teacher about in terms of helping her to improve her strategies. So I thought this clip really showed some of those really good strategies.

Linda: Yeah, those are good points and, and I think, Dee, what you said about modeling, using the opportunity to model, and Brenda, objective writing are all things that we need to hear and we'll talk more about as we go through the day. Thank you. Now, you are going to take some time to think with your facilitator about conducting an observation. Stop the tape now and then resume playing once you have completed your conversations.

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