

Steps to Success: Professional Conferencing Process ? Steps 1 and 2

(link for viewing at end of transcript)

[Music] 1st Voiceover: It's so much better to have the mentor relationship where it's a free exchange of ideas. 2nd Voiceover: Empowering them and let them know if you want to participate you have the right to bring your voice. 3rd Voiceover: I think within myself I feel more confident.

4th Voiceover: I am a support system for her. I am not a criticizing element of this process. 5th Voiceover: She really let's you feel like you have a part in what's going on.

[Music Ends] Linda Warren: Hello and welcome to the TVI for Unit 2. I am Linda Warren and I am the founder and president of Early Childhood Associates and the director of Steps to Success project. I've been a professor at the University of Hawaii and at Wheelock College and I've helped develop statewide standards for early learning and kindergarten. As a former teacher and program director, I know first-hand the rewards and challenges of using outcomes-based frameworks.

Joining me today are Dee Ard and Brenda Eiland-Williford. Dee comes to us from the community action partnership of North Alabama Head Start in Decatur, Alabama. She is presently a mentor for four preschool Head Start classrooms and three Early Head Start classrooms. Her focus is on infant and toddler curriculum and early literacy. Welcome it's great to have you with us today.

Dee Ard: Thank you, Linda. I'm so excited to be here today. I really enjoy mentoring and it's just such a wonderful process.

Linda Warren: And we're looking forward to having you share your insights about observation with us. Brenda Eiland-Williford is director of program services and the Early Reading First project director at the Ounce of Prevention Fund Head Start in Chicago. Brenda has worked in Head Start as a teacher, a coordinator, a manager and a director for more than 25 years. She's a trainer on literacy and guides mentor-coaching at the Ounce of Prevention Fund. We're so happy you could join us today, Brenda.

Brenda Eiland-Williford: Thank you for inviting me. I'm so glad to be here to talk about this very important subject.

Linda Warren: We're very fortunate to have two or multiple perspectives on observation. In this TVI, we'll be focusing on professional conferencing and we'll also be looking at how teachers can support children's writing and alphabet knowledge. Let's take a look at our objectives. First, we'll introduce the 5 steps in the professional conferencing process. Next, we'll take a closer look at the first two steps in the process: the pre-observation conference and the observation. We'll discuss the importance of observation and examine different methods and tools for observation.

We'll discuss and define observer bias. Finally, we'll learn ways to support children's writing and alphabet knowledge and how you can help protégés with their work in this area. Let's get started. The professional conferencing process is a way for mentor-coaches to work with teaching staff and home visitors. The Steps to Success curriculum will help you understand how to successfully use the five-step process. Let's take a look at the steps. The first step is pre-observation conference. Next is observation.

Then post-observation analysis by the mentor-coach and the protégé; that step is followed by a reflective conference. And then finally, there is a post-conference analysis. Today, we're going to concentrate on the first two steps of the process, but an important component of every step is collaboration. Both the mentor-coach and the protégé play a vital and distinct role. Professional conferencing gives protégés an opportunity to reflect, to ask questions, and to raise issues, and to explore new practices.

The process gives mentor-coaches an opportunity to stretch their protégés thinking about their current practices, as well as validate and support their current work. Now let's take a look at what the professional conferencing process looks like in an early childhood setting. We visited programs across the country to give you an introduction to the five steps in the process.

[Video Starts] [Music] Narrator: The early literacy mentor-coach and the protégé start the process by jointly establishing the goals of the observation. Mentor-coach: You want to use an active time and then incorporate some language and literacy into that. Teacher: I had thought -- if you wouldn't mind bringing in the video camera... Mentor-coach: Oh! Sure.

Teacher: ...along with your written... Dee Ard: What would you like to do next with language development? How would like to work more on your conversations? What area would you like to work in? Mercedes Vasquez: So at 2:00 then, I will come in to observe and I do want you to know that I'm not there to evaluate you. Teacher: Good.

Mercedes Vasquez: No, I'm just there to observe. Teacher: That would be good. Narrator: During the observation the ELMC focuses on the agreed-on aspects of the protégés practice and records what she sees. [Music] [Children and Teacher singing]

Narrator: After the observation, the ELMC takes time to make sense of what she experienced. Separately the protégé also takes time to think about whether she met her own goals. The ELMC and the protégé meet to reflect on the practices the mentor observed and to discuss ways to enhance the protégés skills.

Dee Ard: Maybe when you're having conversations similar to that next time, if the children don't go in the directions that you might have thought they needed to go in you might add some prompts. Mentor-coach: So in what ways or are there any ways that I can continue to support you in meeting this goal? Teacher: In four weeks, if you'd like to come back and over the next few weeks I'll really work hard at kind of pulling back... [Music] Narrator: Finally, the ELMC reflects on her own effectiveness as a mentor. [Music Ends] [Video Ends]

Linda Warren: That video highlights the professional conferencing process. We'll revisit each step in detail over the course of Units 2 and 3. Dee and Brenda, share some of your experiences with the professional conferencing process.

Dee Ard: Well I find the conferencing part is so important because that's where you build your relationships. This is the point where you shouldn't have any surprises for your teachers. You've planned everything out. You've set some early goals and then you can move forward with that. When your teacher knows what's...what you're looking for or what you're going to be trying to help her with -- some new strategies, then they feel more comfortable and they're a little more at ease in their classrooms.

Linda Warren: OK, so no surprises and make sure that the teacher has enough information to feel comfortable with the process. Good. Dee Ard: Correct. Linda Warren: Brenda?

Brenda Eiland-Williford: Well, in our program we do the pre-conference. It's called the reflective supervision and we have master teachers/mentor-coaches that work with our teachers and they provide ongoing reflective supervision for the teachers in our program. And during that reflective supervision session, the master teacher/mentor-coach talks with the teacher. She shares her expectations of what the relationship will be -- the teacher shares her expectations of what the relationship will be.

And they really lay out what the long- and short-term goals will be for working within the classroom and providing the support and strategies for improving and enhancing the work that's done in the classroom. It's an opportunity for that relationship to be developed. It's an opportunity to develop trust, to talk about shared goals, long and short goals. It's an opportunity to really have the master teacher develop the confidence in the teacher that this will be a good partnership and that things can be shared and transformation in terms of quality classroom implementation can actually occur within this process.

Linda Warren: Those are really important points and I... And one of the things that I think is really particularly striking

about what you just said is that the goal-setting piece is critical because not only does it create a direction for the future, but it helps to continue to build that relationship which we looked at in Unit 1 so it's continuing to build here.

Brenda Eiland-Williford: They're always coming back to the goals. As they have their reflective supervision sessions. The master teacher/mentor-coach is always coming back to the goals that are joint goals. They're shared goals. And they are talking about the goals on an ongoing basis. And when they do the observations, they're keeping those in mind and really bringing that back as the cornerstone for helping the teacher make improvements and changes within her classroom.

Linda Warren: Well I know we're going to spend more time talking about these particular points as we go through Unit 2, but we will start by taking a closer look at the second step in the professional conferencing process: observation. We're beginning with the second step because the other steps are all built around observation. We visited Dee's program in Alabama to find out why observation is important to her and how it supports her work with protégés. Let's hear what they had to say.

[Video Starts] Dee Ard: I feel that you cannot be a good mentor or coach her effectively if I'm not seeing exactly what's going on in the room. Everything in the classroom affects the things you say and how you react to children. So it's great to be in the room so you can see...get the whole picture so that you can see every child and you can hear all of the conversations that are going on. And you can see all the language development areas that have grown -- and you can see it throughout the room. [Video Ends]

Linda Warren: Dee, we saw that you separated yourself from the action in the classroom while you recorded what you saw and heard. Tell us more about that formal observation process.

Dee Ard: The formal observation process is the time that we have of where we can observe everything that's going on in the classroom and then we can select a portion of what we're observing and help the teacher focus on one child so we can support her and help her grow through that focus on a child so it's a very positive experience.

Linda Warren: So you're looking...helping the teacher work with one child or focus on one child in the context of the classroom and everything else that's going on. Dee Ard: Exactly. Linda Warren: OK.

Dee Ard: This is going to help her overall in her whole classroom, but if we focus on the one child then it takes the pressure off of "Oh I'm not doing something right." Linda Warren: So focus on the child instead of the protégé or the teacher. Dee Ard: Exactly.

Linda Warren: Make the child the centerpiece. Dee Ard: Exactly. Linda Warren: Good. Brenda, tell us why observation is important to you and how it supports your program.

Brenda Eiland-Williford: Well, I think within our program observation is definitely the cornerstone of the mentor-coaching/teacher relationship in that the mentor-coach is in the classroom. She, as Dee mentioned, is stepping back from the activity and that is so very important to step back and really be able to see what's going on in the classroom. And we have to work with our mentor-coaches around that process of stepping back. Sometimes they want to go in and begin to interact with the children and it's so easy to do in the classroom --

some children are coming up to you and they have their favorite books to share and they want you to get involved. And the mentor-coaches in their role have to step back and really observe what's going on and be very objective as they write their observations so that they can have a really good session with that teacher afterwards and share those observations very objectively and share any questions that they...that may have come up as they were doing the observation. And stepping back taking time away from the activity is a very important part of the observation process.

Linda Warren: And stepping back takes some thinking. I mean it doesn't happen naturally does it? Our tendency is to want to play with children. Brenda Eiland-Williford: And you miss...you miss opportunities to see what the teacher's doing and then to share that and have her reflect back on that so being out of the action -- as fun as it may be to get in there -- it is a very important part that the mentor-coach has to do when she's making her observations.

Dee Ard: And our supervisors also give us time and give us focus so that when we go back into the classroom, we have been refocused and our focus may be a little bit more narrow if we've been too broad. Linda Warren: Oh so, at the same time... you know, that kind of feedback that you're getting has such an impact on what you're doing with protégés and how you're viewing a classroom. Good. Thank you.

We've looked at the importance of observation, but we also need to know that there are different types of observation methods. Each type has distinct benefits and limitations. Informal observations are casual drop-in visits. They allow the mentor-coach to get a sense of the overall classroom. Formal observations have a more narrow focus. They allow the mentor-coach to collect information about specific skills or practice. During formal observation, the mentor-coaches need to remove themselves from classroom interactions.

We saw Dee doing this in the last video we watched. During formal observations the mentor-coach tries to make her observations as accurate and objective as possible. Now we want you to take some time to work with your facilitator on observations and the professional conferencing process. Facilitators please stop the video now and resume the tape when you complete your discussions.

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-- Permalink for viewing (requires Flash and JavaScript)

<http://videos.sorensonmedia.com/HEAD+START/000363-Steps+to+Success+Unit+2+Clip+1-Professional+Conferencing+Process-Step+1+and+2-2007-SD360p/7102454ercc5cw43fcD833eOb8b1c09ae28e>